

Challenges Faced by Religions

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The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community



Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as)



AHMADIYYA
MUSLIM COMMUNITY

United States of America

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community is a religious organization, international in its scope, with branches in 207 countries in Africa, North America, South America, Asia, Australia, and Europe. The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was established in 1889 by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as) (1835-1908) in Qadian, a small and remote village in the Punjab province of India. He claimed to be the expected reformer of the latter days, the Awaited One of the world community of religions (The Mahdi and Messiah).

The Movement he started is an embodiment of the benevolent message of Islam – peace, universal brotherhood, and submission to the Will of God – in its pristine purity.

Hazrat Ahmad (as) proclaimed Islam as the religion of man: “The religion of the people of the right path” (The Holy Qur'an: 98:6). The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was created under divine guidance with the objective to rejuvenate Islamic moral and spiritual values. It encourages interfaith dialogue, diligently defends Islam and tries to correct misunderstandings about Islam in the West. It advocates peace, tolerance, love and understanding among followers of different faiths. It firmly believes in and acts upon Qura'nic teaching:

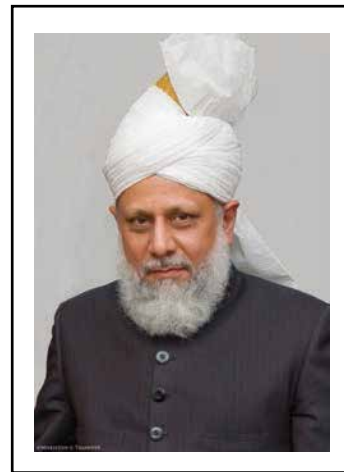
“There is no compulsion in religion” (The Holy Qur'an: 2:257).

Ahmadiyya Muslim Community strongly rejects violence and terrorism in any form and for any reason.

Community has been headed by his elected successors. The present Head of the Community, Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad, was elected in 2003. His official title is Khalifatul Masih V or Fifth Successor of the Promised Messiah (as).

www.alislam.org

www.muslimsunrise.com



Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad,
Khalifatul Masih V (aba)

The Muslim Sunrise

www.muslimsunrise.com

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Dr. Mufti Muhammad Sadiq (ra) was the first Ahmadiyya Muslim missionary to arrive in America. In 1921, he founded the Muslim Sunrise, which stands today as the longest running Muslim publication in America. The magazine seeks to open discussions on Islam and topics relating to religion in general. It highlights the role of Islam in an ever-changing global society. It provides a platform for public opinion on contemporary issues and presents their solutions from an Islamic perspective.

The Muslim Sunrise welcomes letters to the Editor, Questions and Submissions.

Email us at MuslimSunrise@Ahmadiyya.us or go online to www.MuslimSunrise.com



Acronyms for salutations used in this publication

- sa: Sallallahu 'Alaihi Wa Sallam (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)
as: 'Alaihis-Salam (may peace be upon him)
ra: Radhi-Allahu 'Anhu/'Anha (may Allah be pleased with him/her)
rh: Rahimahullahu Ta'ala (may Allah shower His mercy on him)
aba: Ayyadahullahu Ta'ala Bi-Nasrihil-'Aziz (may Allah support him with His mighty help)

Verse numbers in the references from the Holy Qur'an count Tasmiya at the beginning of a chapter as the first verse.

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Muslims follow the name of God's prophets with the prayer *alaihis salaam* or 'may peace be upon him,' and for the Holy Prophet Muhammad, *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* or 'may peace and blessings of God be upon him.' Companions of prophets and righteous personalities who have passed away are saluted by *radhi-Allaho anhu/a* or 'may Allah be pleased with him/her.' While such salutations sometimes are not set out in the text for readability, we encourage readers to offer these prayers as if set out in full.

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FROM THE HOLY QUR'AN

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ①

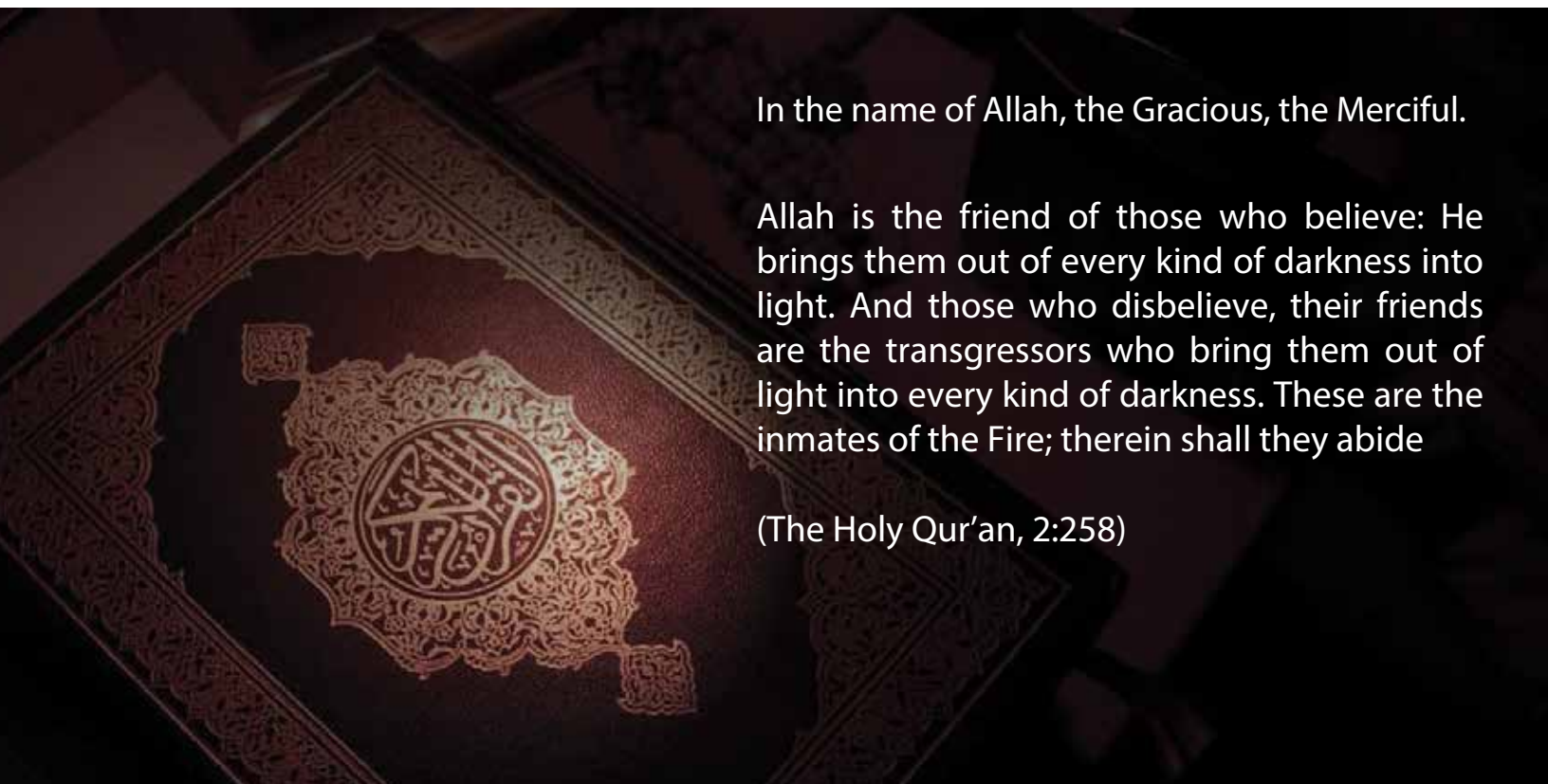
اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ
الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۚ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا
أُولَئِهِمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ
النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ ۗ أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ
النَّارِ ۖ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ②

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In the name of Allah, the Gracious, the Merciful.

Allah is the friend of those who believe: He brings them out of every kind of darkness into light. And those who disbelieve, their friends are the transgressors who bring them out of light into every kind of darkness. These are the inmates of the Fire; therein shall they abide

(The Holy Qur'an, 2:258)



HAQITH

SAYINGS OF THE

PROPHET

MUHAMMAD (sa)

Hazrat Abu Hurairah(ra) relates:

"While the Holy Prophet was talking to the people in a gathering, a rustic came and asked, 'When will the Doomsday be?' The Messenger of Allah continued his talk. Some of those present thought that he had heard him but did not like the interruption and the others said he did not hear him. When he finished his speech, he said, 'Where is the one who inquired about the Doomsday?' The man said, 'Here I am, O Messenger of Allah.' He said, 'When the trust is betrayed expect the Doomsday.' The man inquired, 'How the trust will be betrayed?' He answered, 'When authority is committed to those not fit to administer it, then wait for the Doomsday.'"

(Bukhari kitabul 'ilm)



EDITORIAL

SUMMER 2018

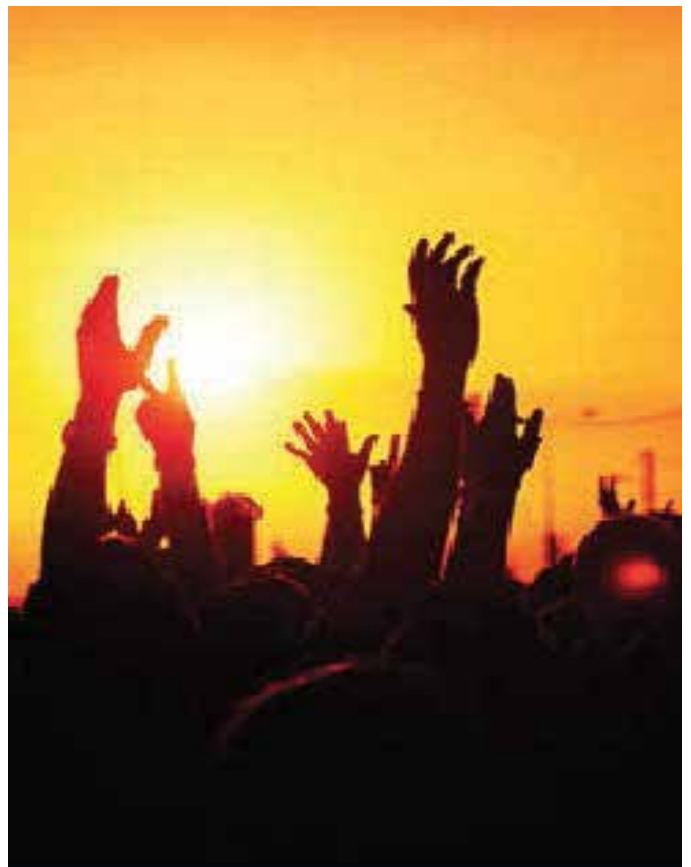
All major world religions have faced great challenges from their very inception; but presently it appears that the powerful anti-religious forces are in full gear to attack from all possible fronts. Atheism and agnosticism are on the rise, getting well-organized and vocal. They say there is no place for any organized religion in our modern societies, no need of worshipping any God. According to them, the study of nature contradicts the existence of life after death; there is no proof of Hereafter, therefore, no accountability of our good or bad actions. The present day anti-religious trends are leading to secularism and materialism; and the love for worldly possessions is leading to self-centeredness, away from the paths to God and generosity.

Unfortunately, the history of religions is also full of coercion and violence by one against the other. There has been persecution and armed clashes on theological disputes. At present time, bloodshed on the bases of religious difference is still going on. Specifically some so-called Muslim groups are promoting abhorrent acts of violence and terrorism. Their motives might be political or economical, but they excite ignorant mobs to commit brutality towards the followers of opposing religions or different denominations in the name of their religion. Not only outside forces are attacking religious communities and belief systems, but from within religious organizations the rebellious elements are also busy in creating tremendous problems for religious leaders. For religious elite it is becoming difficult to instill the scriptural beliefs and practices among their followers.

In this issue of the Muslim Sunrise we have tried to cover some of the present day challenges to world religions in general, and to Islam in particular. There

are articles on Secularism, Naturalism and Spiritualism, Sunni Shia Conflict, and what is now widely termed as 'Islamism' – and in fact a reference to the militant groups within Muslim countries who are primarily motivated by geopolitics. Muslims are also facing challenges of alcoholism and gambling in Islamic countries, and especially living in Western societies. Among these challenges, the question whether Muslim women are oppressed or liberated in Islam is also addressed. Please, read these articles and give us your feedback.

Mubasher Ahmad
Editor-in-Chief



IN THE WORDS OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH^(as)

Blessings of Islam

[A'ina-e-Kamalat-e-Islam, Ruhani Khaza'in,
Vol. 5, pp. 226-227]

Let it be clear that when a true seeker lives Islam in full, and each one of his faculties, without any affectation or pretence, spontaneously begins to tread the path of God Almighty, the result of his efforts is that the higher manifestations of Divine guidance, freed from all intervening veils, hasten towards him. Diverse types of blessings descend upon him. The commandments and doctrines, which were accepted on faith and as hearsay, are now experienced by him as realities and certainties through true visions, and definite and unambiguous revelation. The mysteries of the faith and the law are revealed to him and he is afforded a view of the Divine kingdom so that he should arrive at the stage of perfect certainty and understanding. A blessing characterizes his tongue and his words and all his actions and his movements. He is bestowed extraordinary courage and steadfastness and his understanding is expanded at a high level. The characteristic failing of humankind, meanness, miserliness, the tendency towards frequent stumbling, short-sightedness, proneness towards passion, lowliness of behavior and every darkness of his ego are totally removed from him and he is filled with the light of Divine attributes. Thereupon, he undergoes an entire change and puts on the garment of a new birth. He hears through God Almighty, sees through Him, moves with Him and stops with Him. His anger becomes the wrath of God Almighty, and his compassion becomes the compassion of God Almighty.

When he arrives at that stage, his prayers are heard as a mark of his having been chosen, and not merely as a trial; and he becomes the proof of God on earth and personifies security from God. There is joy in heaven on his account and the highest gift that is bestowed upon him is the word of God which descends upon his heart free from any doubt, like the light of the moon shining through without any mistiness. It carries an effective sense of delight with it and bestows satisfaction, comfort and security. The difference between this

converse with God and revelation is that revelation is like a perennial spring that flows continuously to the chosen ones of God. They speak, see and hear with the Holy Spirit and all other intentions are born of the breath of the Holy Spirit. The truth of the matter is that they become the reflection and embodiment of the Qur'anic verse

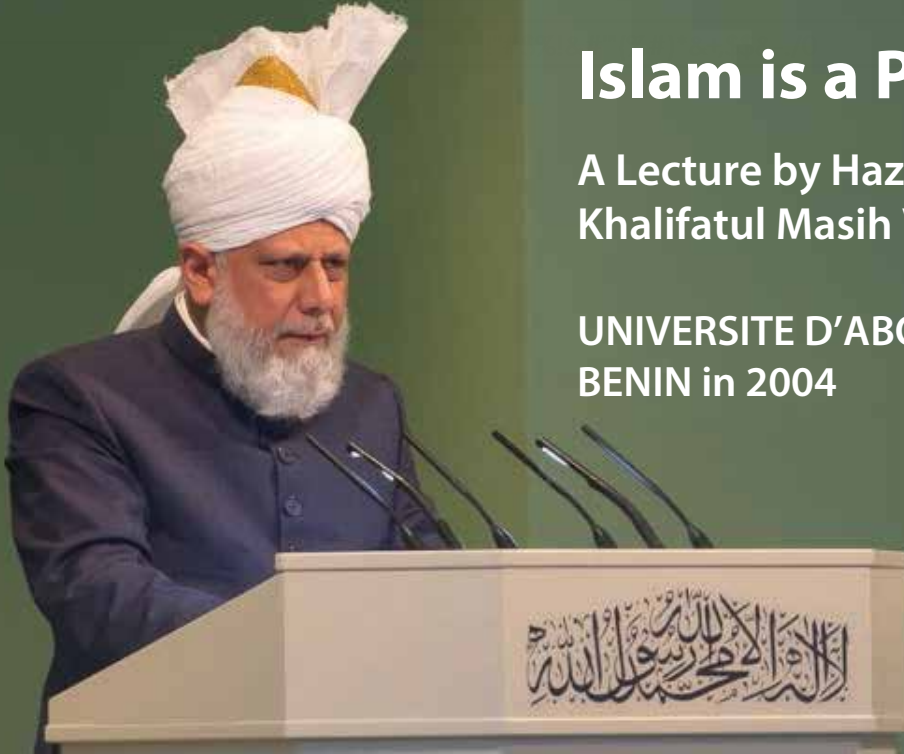
'Nor does he speak out of his own desire. It is nothing but pure revelation that has been revealed by God.' (al-Najm, 53:4-5)

But converse with God is different. It means that the word of God descends upon them in the form of verbal revelation. They hear the response to their questions from God such as a friend receives from a friend. We can only define it by saying that it is a special manifestation of God the Glorious, which is conveyed through a favorite angel. Its purpose is to give intimation of the acceptance of prayer, or to communicate a new or secret matter, or to make aware of something that is to happen in the future, or to convey God's pleasure or lack of it concerning any matter, or to create certainty and understanding concerning some matter. It is a Divine voice that manifests itself in the form of converse in order to create understanding and satisfaction. It is not possible to define it any more than to say that it is a voice which proceeds from God and is experienced in delicious words full of blessings, which is not induced by any thinking or reflection or any intrusion of self and is blessed with a Divine manifestation and Divine majesty.

Islam is a Peaceful Religion

A Lecture by Hazrat Mirza Masroor Ahmad,
Khalifatul Masih V (aba)

UNIVERSITE D'ABOMEY- C A L AVI COTONOU,
BENIN in 2004



Dear students and staff members at this university,
Assalamu alaikum warahmatullah !

I have been asked to shed some light on Islam as a peaceful religion. In view of the shortage of time, I can only address this subject briefly. Whenever one wishes to speak about Islam as a religion of peace, the question naturally springs to mind that whereas there are so many religions in the world such as Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc., when it comes to finding out whether Islam is a religion of peace, why should Islam be the odd one out?

One reason for this is that a few years after the beginning of Islam, anti-Islamic powers began propaganda that Islam is a religion of extremism and violence and wants to compel others into belief by means of the sword. This, of course, is incorrect. In the beginning, the Muslims of Makkah suffered persecution but they remained silent. Finally, they migrated to Madinah but there too the disbelievers hounded the Muslims and forced upon them a battle to which I will revert later. The proof against those opponents who allege that Islam was spread by the sword is that although the disbelievers of Makkah raised all sorts of objections, yet history stands witness to the fact that the people of Makkah themselves never complained that the Muslims had used the sword against the disbelievers to compel them to change their faith.

Secondly, what has given Islam a bad name is an ugly and awful image of extremism presented, whether knowingly or unwittingly, by some Muslim groups and organizations, and these groups unfortunately had personal vested interests.

In order to see a religion's beauties or its defects, justice requires that you should make its teachings or its holy scripture the anvil by which to judge it, otherwise everyone would accuse every other faith willy-nilly. For instance, the teaching of Christianity, according to the Holy Bible, is:

'But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.'
(Matthew: 5:39)

But, in Bosnia or Iraq or other countries, America and the other Western powers, resorted or are resorting to aggression. If, however, we say that the Christian teaching is that if anyone raises his head against you, you should use all your might to trample it to death; this would be a grave injustice. In the same way, to find out the true teachings of Islam, we would have to study the Holy Qur'an and see what it says and not base it on the actions of some Muslims who have forgotten the teachings of the Holy Qur'an.

The stand of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community is that the teaching of the Holy Qur'an promotes peace. We have to take this message to every corner of the world. Therefore, I shall begin my message today by reference to the Holy Qur'an. After that we shall examine the practice of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) to whom the teachings of the Holy Qur'an were revealed. Did he ever support any kind of cruelty, violence or extremist terrorism? Then, based on the Holy Qur'an and the Traditions of the Holy Prophet (sa), some important clarification has been provided to us by the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, Hadhrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian

(as), who claimed that he was the Promised Messiah, and I shall refer to some of his writings.

Anyhow, let us first see what the Holy Qur'an commands us to do in order to establish peace. God Almighty says in the Holy Qur'an:

Whosoever killed a person – unless it is for killing a person or for creating disorder in the land – it shall be as if he had killed all mankind.
(Al Ma'idah, Ch.5: v. 33)

Explaining this verse, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community says:

'A person who kills a person unfairly or who kills someone who had neither rebelled, nor became a source of violating peace amongst the people nor created disorder in the land, it is as if he has killed the whole of mankind. In other words to kill a person without any cause is, according to God Almighty, like the murder of the entire human race. It is obvious from this verse, how big a sin it is to take the life of another person without reason.'

(Lecture Chashma-e-Ma'rifat, pp 23-24: Commentary by the Promised Messiah Vol.2: p.405)

Thus, this is the beautiful teaching of Islam that the unlawful killing or the shedding of innocent blood of someone is like the killing of the entire human race, that is to say, the taking of a single life is like the massacre of thousands of innocent lives. Now, everyone can very well imagine what kind of sentence would be passed on someone who is found guilty of the taking of thousands of innocent lives. So this is the beautiful teaching given to us by God Almighty in the Holy Qur'an. Whosoever acts against this, acts against the teachings of Islam.

Then, the Holy Founder of the Ahmadiyya community takes us further than this because it was after his true reflection and deliberation and his understanding of Islamic teachings that God Almighty provided him with the guidance. Commenting on this verse, he adds:

'He who abandons kindness abandons religion. The Holy Qur'an teaches that whosoever kills a person without justifiable cause will be as if he has killed the whole world. In the same way, I say that if someone is not kind unto his brother, it is like he has been unkind to the whole world.'

(Al Hakm Vol. 9 No.15 dated 30 April 1905 p.2: Commentary by the Promised Messiah, Vol.2: p.405)

Now on this verse, the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community has drawn an interesting conclusion that people think

that Islam is an extremist religion but this is a misunderstanding on their part. Islam is saying that even if you are unkind in your treatment with your fellow human being, you are a cause of destroying the peace and harmony of the world. Forget killing anyone, you should always be kind in your dealings with every person in the world and spread the peaceful message of Islam.

I shall briefly explain some of the countless examples of kindness we find in the life of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) and how concerned he was about the condition of his people.

If someone is kind to some person and wants to see his or her betterment, then the person will try his best to do something for him or her. The Holy Prophet (sa) was so kind and anxious for his people and prayed for them even though they believed in so many gods that it is beyond our imagination. God Almighty has promised that He would most surely punish those who associate others with God. Now, this thought that God Almighty would never forgive one who associates partners with God, used to make the Holy Prophet (sa) restless so much so that he would bow down repeatedly in prayers. He had a burning passion in his heart for the reformation of his people that he had become weary with worry for his people. Finally, God Almighty had to tell him not to grieve himself to death for sorrow after them (Ch.18:v.7) and that his mission was only to give them the message. We can judge his prayers from the following Tradition:

The Holy Prophet (sa) prayed for his enemies:

'O Allah! Guide my people because they know not (do not know the truth)'. Islam is saying that even if you are unkind in your treatment with your fellow human being, you are a cause of destroying the peace and harmony of the world. Forget killing anyone, you should always be kind in your dealings with every person in the world and spread the peaceful message of Islam. In the same way, when once he was asked to pray that a curse befalls the Dossan tribe, he prayed instead:
'O Allah! Guide the tribe of Dossan.'

So this was the anxiety in him for kindness and for humanity. He never said that he was going to compel them into belief by use of the sword but in fact refrained from any malediction or uttering any curse that an evil befalls his enemy.

'The pagans of Makkah exiled the Holy Prophet (sa) from Makkah and gave him no respite in Madinah but whenever he met them, the Holy Prophet (sa) dealt with gracious kindness towards them. After the migration of the Holy Prophet (sa) to Madinah, the people of Makkah had to suffer a severe drought so much so that they had to live on dead meat and bones. Then in utter helplessness, Abu Sufyan, the leader of the Makkans, had to approach the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) and said: "O Muhammad! You command treating one's own relatives well.

Your people are dying. Pray to your God in our favour (that this famine passes away) and it begins to rain lest your people perish."

To bring Abu Sufyan down to earth, the Holy Prophet (sa) remarked that you are very brave and courageous that despite the transgression by the Makkans, you demand a prayer on their behalf. But the Holy Prophet (sa) did not refuse to pray because he was mercy personified and he could have never wished that his people should perish. Then the people observed that his hands went up in prayers immediately and the Holy Prophet's prayers for an end to the famine and the heavens to open up were duly accepted. It rained so much that the days of ease and abundance returned for the Quraish of Makkah. But, at the same time, their denial and opposition grew rapidly.'

(Bukhari: Kitabul Tafseer Sura Al-Rum)

Now after this who can say that he gave a teaching of extremism and terrorism.

THERE IS NO COMPULSION OF FAITH IN ISLAM

Then the Holy Qur'an states:

There should be no compulsion in religion. Surely, right has become distinct from wrong; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. And Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (Ch.2:V.257)

Its explanation and practical application can be seen from this Tradition when the Banu Nadir was exiled from Madinah when they failed to fulfill their promise to maintain peace. At that time they also had many children of the Ansar (Muslim inhabitants of Madinah). These children had begun to live amongst the Jews, because in the pre-Islamic days of ignorance, amongst the Arab tribes of Aus and Khazraj, those who had no male children used to pledge that if the next child were born a male they would make him a Jew. Thus, there were many boys from the Aus and Khazraj tribes who had been handed over to Jewish families. When the Jews of Banu Nadir were exiled because of their transgression, the Muslims wanted to get back their own descendants from the Jews. The Holy Prophet of Islam (sa) refrained them from their action on the very basis that 'there is no compulsion in religion' that once you hand over your own son to someone else and that someone else makes your descendant a follower of Judaism, you cannot take him back: he would have to go with the Banu Nadir.

Then there is the account of a slave of Hadhrat Umar (ra) who narrates that although he was a slave of Hadhrat Umar (ra), Hadhrat Umar (ra) never forced him to become a Muslim. Hadhrat Umar (ra) most certainly used to explain to him with love and affection to become a Muslim but the slave would

refuse and Hadhrat Umar (ra) would only say: There is no compulsion in faith and fell silent after that. Finally, before his death, he set this slave free. Now who can, therefore, say that there is any room for compulsion or causing a breach of peace in Islam?

The Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community, the Promised Messiah (as) says:

'I know not wherefrom our opponents or from whom they have heard that Islam was spread by the sword. God says in the Holy Qur'an that there is no compulsion in the Islamic faith. Then who gave the order of force? What were the weapons of that force? And what kind of sincerity and belief is it of those compelled to become Muslims that without being paid and despite being a mere two to three hundred men, they should confront a force of thousands? Then, when they should have grown into thousands, they should defeat several hundred thousands, and, in order to save their faith from the enemy, they should offer their heads like sacrificial lambs and should seal the truth of their faith with their own blood. And they should be so passionate for spreading the Oneness of God that like refugees, they should endure such hardship and reach the desert of Africa and spread Islam on that continent; and should bear such difficulties and reach China not in the form of invaders but as refugees and should call the people of China to Islam. Say honestly, is this the work of those who were forced to become Muslims? Those whose hearts disbelieve, can their tongues believe? No, but this is the work of those whose hearts are filled with the light of faith and in whose hearts there is none but God and God.'

(Paigham Sulh: Ruhani Khazain, Vol.23, pp.468-469)

FREEDOM OF FAITH AND CONSCIENCE

Amongst the very many traditions about the teaching of Islam on the freedom of faith and conscience, perhaps just one account is enough after which there is no need of further clarification.

'Despite becoming the subjects of the Holy Prophet (sa), some groups of opponents wanted to hang on to their own faith. The question came to their mind as to what would happen to them because they knew that the Holy Prophet (sa) required that every man had the right to believe in any faith. These opponents had not accepted this demand but in the past had used force against the Muslims. When the opponents had been defeated, the Holy Prophet (sa), decided to remove their humiliation and addressing them suggested: "The principle for whose acceptance I fought against you will not be abandoned because of your opposition to it. Undoubtedly, because of your cruel mentality, you adopted a wrong course of action, but rights shall be preserved. Go, no blame attaches on you. Each one of you is free in matters of faith. You are our Zimmi (a

non-Muslim living in a Muslim country). God and His Messenger shall be fully responsible for your safety.'

[Nisb al Raiah fi Takhrij Ahadith Al Hadaya Vol. 4, p.381 published Egypt]

Then Allah says:

O ye who believe! be steadfast in the cause of Allah, bearing witness in equity; and let not a people's enmity incite you to act otherwise than with justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah. Surely, Allah is aware of what you do.

(Sura Al-Ma'idah – Ch.5:V.9)

Let us now examine the practical application of this Qur'anic teaching. After this who can say that Islam is not a religion of peace, harmony, reconciliation and justice.

'It is narrated that Muhayyasa, Allah be pleased with him, a Companion of the Holy Prophet (sa) was killed as a martyr in Khyber. His beneficiaries asked the Holy Prophet (sa) for the capital punishment. The Holy Prophet (sa) asked: Can you swear and determine his killer? They said: O Prophet of God, we were not there so how can we swear? He replied: There can be no capital punishment without proof. There is only one possibility that the Jews of Khyber whom you suspect should according to the law swear fifty times that they know not who is the killer. The beneficiaries of Muhayyasa, Allah be pleased with him, said: Who can trust these Jews, they will take false oaths. The Holy Prophet (sa) replied: Then beyond this no cross-examination is permitted because in the sight of the law, there can be no preference. After this the Holy Prophet (sa) paid blood money to the beneficiaries of Muhayyasa.'

(Tajrid Al-Bukhari, Chapter Faslil Jihad, Part 2 published by Ferozsons Lahore)

From these verses it should have become clear that according to the teachings of Islam there can be no compulsion in matters of faith. God Almighty has left the choice of which belief to accept to be determined by the conscience of each person. In fact, the example I gave earlier of the slave, even in his case he was not forced to accept Islam. The Holy Qur'an mentions this freedom of conscience in various verses and it is not possible to mention all of them here.

In brief, after this clear and unambiguous teaching, the question arises that if the Holy Prophet (sa) or his Companions did not hold the sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other nor destroyed the peace of the world, what are these holy wars and what is this thing called Jihad which is on everyone's lips and for which every Muslim is being blamed for causing mayhem in the world? The amazing thing is that it is believed that these wars started during the time of the Holy Prophet (sa). We would have to fulfill the requirements of absolute justice and examine the situation of that age because without bringing that age to

the fore, it would be impossible to do justice. In this connection, I set out briefly the words of the Founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community who says:

Our Prophet (sa) endured pain in Makkah and even after this at the hands of the disbelievers and in particular just to picture in our minds how the thirteen years in Makkah were spent under such persecution and cruelty of all kinds that it makes us weep. But he did not raise a sword nor replied to their harsh words with harshness – till many Companions and his dear friends had been murdered most cruelly; and, were made to suffer all kinds of ordeals; and, sometimes were poisoned; and, many a plots were hatched of assassinating him in which the opponents remained unsuccessful. When the question arises that if the Holy Prophet(sa) or his Companions did not hold the sword in one hand and the Qur'an in the other nor destroyed the peace of the world, what are these holy wars and what is this thing called Jihad which is on everyone's lips and for which every Muslim is being blamed for causing mayhem in the world?' the time of God's reckoning approached, it so happened that all the leaders and highly placed persons in Makkah unanimously agreed that come what may, the Holy Prophet(sa) had to be killed. At that time, God Who is the Guardian and Protector of His beloved and honest and truthful ones, informed the Holy Prophet (sa) that apart from evil there was nothing left in this town and its people were hell-bent on murder and that he should leave at once. Then, under divine command, he migrated towards Madinah but even there his enemies did not leave him and chased him in pursuit and in any case wanted to destroy Islam. When their mischief had gone beyond recall and the murder of many innocent ones made their killers worthy of punishment, at that time was the permission granted in the interest of defense and self-preservation. Moreover, many of those innocent ones who had been killed in mischief and otherwise than in open combat and their properties had been seized had deserved that their opponents should be dealt in this manner. But at the time of the victory of Makkah, our Prophet (sa) forgave all of them. Therefore, this thought that the Holy Prophet (sa) and his Companions engaged in any war to spread the faith or to compel anyone to become a Muslim is a terrible error and cruelty.

(Masih Hindustan Mein pp.7-8: Tafseer Hadhrat Masih Maud Vol. 3: pp.316-317)

And despite the permission granted to engage in a defensive battle against these pursuers and cruel persecutors, the consistent teaching of God Almighty was not to exceed the limits as it is stated:

And fight them until there is no persecution, and religion is freely professed for Allah. But if they desist, then remember that no hostility is allowed except against the aggressors.

(Surah Al-Baqarah Ch.2: v.194)

So, here this commandment of war is for defensive war and to end evil and that is why it is stated that when they desist, then you are not to engage in battle with them because your true job is to establish peace.

WAR PRINCIPLES AND REGULATIONS

When the Holy Prophet (sa) engaged in a battle, he used to firmly order that:

- No woman be killed;
 - No children be killed;
 - The old not be impeded;
 - Nothing be said to the refugees, monks or hermits;
 - No person be set on fire;
 - No animal be killed;
 - No tree be cut down;
 - Unlike your enemy, no person's nose or ear be cut off.
- Then having been victorious, he used to proclaim:
- No injured be killed;
 - Do not pursue unnecessarily anyone who escapes.

Then in connection with prisoners of war, he used to ask for their kind treatment. 'Thus the prisoners taken after the Battle of Badr themselves admitted that: By God! The Muslims walked on foot while we were made to ride, they remained hungry themselves whilst they fed us, they remained thirsty while they gave us water.'

(Bukhari, Muslim, Tirmidhi, Abu Daud)

Those who call Islam a belligerent, trigger happy and extremist religion should think whether a belligerent religion can give this kind of teaching. Do not toss the action of a few people and organizations into the lap of Islam and call it Islam. Today, in this age when man considers himself highly advanced and under-standing should ask himself whether these high values manifest themselves when bombs rain down from the skies, when missiles are fired on cities and dwellings. How much blood is shed of innocent lives in this indiscriminate bombardment which falls here and kills one here and another one there? In areas where there is anarchy, each day there are funerals of the old, women and children. Such news is not hidden from our eyes.

In conclusion, I end my subject of Islam's beautiful teaching and its promotion of peace and its teaching which united a diverse mankind into a single brotherhood with a quotation from a Christian historian, Georgie Zeidan:

'A primary reason for the rapid progress in Muslim education is that the Caliphs of Islam greatly valued the scholars of all faiths and all people and always enriched them with awards of gifts and bounties. They had no concern with their religion or their nationality or their caste or creed. Amongst them were Christians, Jews, Sabians, magicians, sooth-sayers and in fact people

from every group. The Caliphs dealt with them with extreme reverence, respect and esteem. The non-Muslims had the same rights and freedoms that the Muslim leaders and governors enjoyed.'

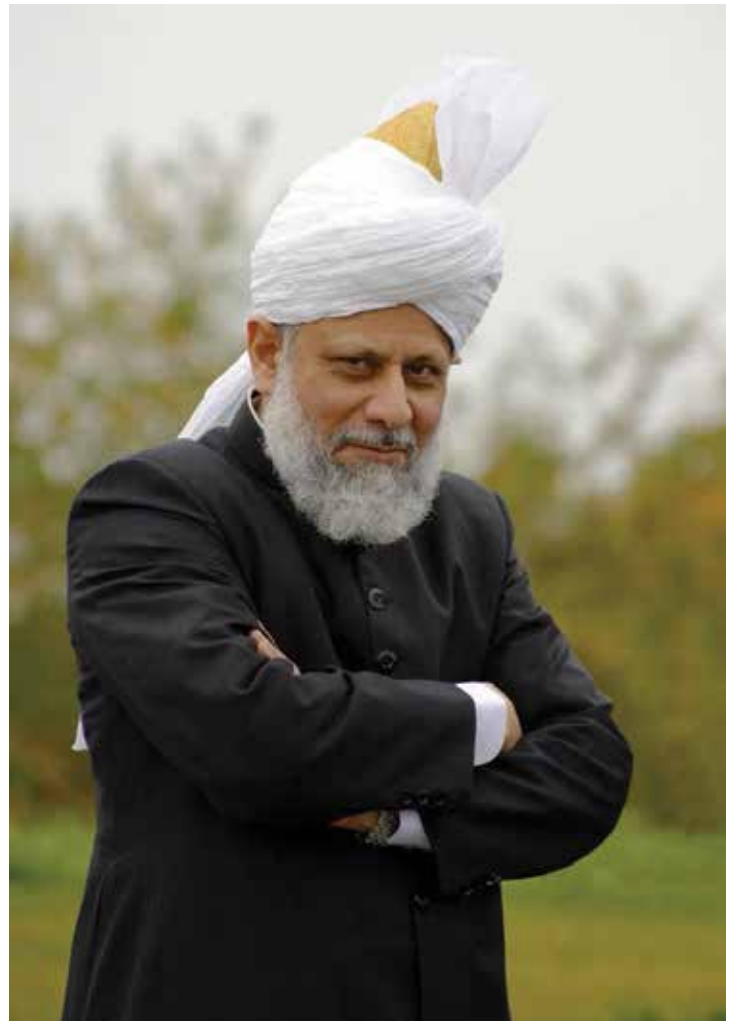
(Tarikh Al Tamaddan Al-Islami Vol.3, p.194)

Now if after this anyone says that Islam is not a religion of peace, it would be a grave injustice.

I hope that in view of the shortage of time whatever I have said would have shown you some aspects of Islamic teaching of peace.

I am grateful to you for listening to my address with attention and respect.

Thank you, once again.



HAZRAT MIRZA MASROOR AHMAD, KHALIFATUL MASIH V,
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Atheism and Agnosticism: A look into spiritual practices and belief in God

Rabia Salim

I had an interesting conversation with an agnostic Religious Education teacher during her lesson on justice, one of many I have experienced while working in a high school. My strong belief system and my world built from childhood felt like a blanket for me. The reason I profess belief in one God, the first pillar of Islam, as all Muslims do, is faith. I persist with this journey because as I live life, all roads seem inevitably to lead to the One Who created me, God.

In education, and in science in particular, spirituality leading to God is the road to enlightenment. A blinding quote by Albert Einstein has me in awe every time I read it. Einstein said: "A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'universe,' limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest – a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a prison, restricting us to our desires and affection for a few persons close to us. Our task must be to free ourselves by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature and its beauty. Nobody can achieve this completely but striving for such achievement is in itself a part of liberation and foundation for inner security."(1)

An analysis of human behavior accurately encapsulated by Einstein! When each person has their private thoughts and beliefs, a human self-inflates his ego, and he thinks his existence is grandiose when in fact it is a speck of insignificance. God gives us a reality check on our lives in the Holy Qur'an:

"If every ocean became ink for the words of my Lord, surely, the ocean would be exhausted before the words of my Lord were exhausted."(2)

God also says in the Holy Qur'an regarding man's self-importance:

"And when We bestow a favor on man he goes away, turning aside; but when evil touches him, lo! he starts offering long prayers."(3)

Also,

"And turn not thy cheek away from men in scorn, nor walk in the earth haughtily."(4)

The 'delusional prison' comes from restricting one's worldview to obscurity and being closed off, whereas spiritual power comes from embracing the role of one part of the whole of existence. Belief in God is the basis of one's purpose in life.

One challenge for atheists or agnostics is a belief in God without scientific evidence. In fact, many things cannot be explained by an atheistic view. Take spirituality, for instance, a topic that was covered in depth in the Spring 2013 issue of the Muslim Sunrise. Spirituality powers organized religion and is linked to all sorts of life positives, such as greater connectivity with the world, which makes life more fulfilling and ultimately increases a person's life satisfaction.

An article in 'The Guardian' newspaper (US edition) aims to expound upon why spirituality affects humans so profoundly. This article offers insights such as: 'Inspired humans have spirituality, whilst listening to music or reading a book' and 'the force of spirituality changes the way one sees others.'(5) The author also alludes to the idea-one that Einstein had put forward- that pure spirituality does not mean the person escapes the world to experience it; rather, the person enjoys a more productive engagement in the world, and with the world, through a spiritual life.

One salient thought to keep in mind is that all Prophets of God showed evidence of spiritual support throughout their lives, pure lives that continue to enlighten people to this day. Their righteous actions motivated people to purify their own lives, leaving an enormous impact on human nature. The one thing missing from an atheistic life -belief in a Creator- cannot easily be quantified, reasoned or physically shown; this does not mean, however, that faith is without reason. Islam teaches us that conviction of God's existence comes only after a person accepts the truth and has faith in the truth. It does not come in the form of a lightning bolt from the sky, or even more comically, as a booming voice (of God) from the heavens. This notion is ridiculous. No doubt, the human intellect needs reasoning as much as faith; Islam shows us how to search for and to acquire spirituality.(6)

In Islam, there are a few basic philosophies underlying belief in God that are covered here for the benefit of understanding the subject. Firstly, given the transcendent nature of God, merely because one does not have direct evidence of something,

does not mean one can negate its existence. Secondly, the purpose of human creation is to form a relationship with God by choosing to know Him. It is not reasonable to think that God could have proven His existence to all in one moment. Since He did not do so, that does not mean that He does not exist. If this was the case, there would be no merit in holding a belief; nobody could choose their path of faith and become deserving of a relationship with God. There are those who pray, persevere, and do good to others to attain a spiritual pinnacle. The highest rank of these believers are Prophets including Buddha, Moses, Confucius, Jesus, Socrates, Muhammad (peace be upon them), to list just a few. Thirdly, spiritual investigation is the science of spirituality and leads to certainty. Once a person sets out on the paths of investigation, he/she can acquire evidence to affect his/her thoughts and decisions; even character is molded in this vein to possess high moral qualities.

Keeping in mind these significant aspects from the Islamic viewpoint about spirituality, let us turn to another challenge to belief in God, the question of suffering. Many people see evil in the world, and this makes them unsure of the existence of God. It is also the case that people see success achieved through worldly pursuits and question the necessity of sacrifices they make in life to pursue God. They question why they should not merely immerse themselves in the apparent comfort they perceive in the glitter and glamor of worldly and materialistic life.

To highlight again, the Islamic principle already mentioned: the purpose of our creation is to develop a long and lasting relationship with our Creator. Suffering can be a way to spot the diamond in the rough, so to speak, and to strengthen character to make us understand whether or not we are worthy of that life-giving bond with God. When it comes to faith, consciousness plays a significant part in our understanding of

faith; it gives humans the experience of joy, happiness, and pleasure as well as sorrow, distress, and hopelessness because one experience cannot exist without the other. Suffering is the evolution of our consciousness, and in Islam, it plays into the grand scheme of life, namely, that human beings may be tried and tested to see who is the foremost in deeds. The second point to explain is the idea of evolution. If all beings had been given equal amounts of happiness with enough to survive, competition for food and survival would not exist. The result of this would be zero advancements in the stages of life, and it would stay fixed at that initial point forever. Throughout the history of the world, suffering has served as a useful teacher and character builder. Thirdly, Islamic teachings do not stipulate that all suffering is always a form of punishment. There are some situations where retribution for a wrong committed cause a degree of suffering, for example, if a person chooses to drink and drive, causing harm to another person, he/she will suffer by going to the prison. It is essential to understand that the causative elements, namely, illness, good health, misfortune, good fortune, ability, and disability, are all part of the same grand scheme, and are not rendered as reward or punishment in all circumstances.⁽⁷⁾ This is crucial when considering the Islamic view of suffering.

A more in-depth analysis of this subject matter is not possible in this brief article, and only three aspects of this vast topic may be discussed concisely. However, one vital point must be mentioned, and that is, the Islamic view does not subscribe to chance. In life, one way or another, everything ultimately leads to a Wise and Gracious Creator, God.

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Naturalism vs Spiritualism

Amtul Kafi Yadullah Bhunnoo

Naturalism is the idea that all things exist in the physical form and that science can answer its existence. The idea of Spiritualism is that a Deity whom we call God exists and has created the world around us. Naturalism and spiritualism seem to have contradictory views of life, since naturalists believe that everything exists in nature because it just so happens to be that way whereas spiritualists argue that things exist due to a reason that is attributed to a Creator.

The modern world is inclining more and more towards naturalism due to the ability to stay disconnected from the world around us and staying connected to the world in our hands, the social media. Social media has taken over our lives and made us isolated, yet we are updated with our surroundings. This has actually backfired with the concept of family, that is the natural inclination of humans or in fact any social animals. Family unit is the cornerstone of society. We are starting to disregard the feelings of others; people have neglected their neighbours let alone their own family members. People have become oblivious to their surroundings too and their eyes are glued to the phone in their hands. Rather than observing nature people have no thoughts other than the digital.

The Holy Qur'an says that:

"In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alteration of the night and the day there are indeed Signs for men of understanding; Those who remember Allah while standing, sitting, and lying on their sides, and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth: "Our Lord, Thou hast not created this in vain; nay, Holy art Thou; save us, then, from the punishment of the Fire." (3:191-192). (1)

"Do they not then look at the camel, how it is created? And at the heaven, how it is raised high? And at the mountains, how they are set up? And at the earth, how it is spread out? Admonish, therefore, for thou art but an admonisher" (88:18-22). (2)

Mindfulness and Meditation

Naturalists seek evidence from our surroundings in terms of science; however, it needs to be understood that naturalism and spiritualism are two sides of the same coin. Our physical senses (touch, taste, sight, smell and sound) allow us to make sense of our physical world. But it is our conscience that allows us to feel things that cannot be physically

sensed. These include morals, ethics and emotions.

Naturalists want to identify the existence of God through a telescope or a microscope yet just because we cannot see it; it does not mean that it does not exist. To develop spiritualism, we need to sharpen our inner eyes, looking deep into our conscience for that is where God is found as again mentioned in the Holy Qur'an:



"And assuredly, We have created man and We know what his physical self-whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than even his jugular vein" (50:17). (3)

The modern society despite encouraging mindfulness and meditation, it is only through prayer that one feels the most satisfaction. Both the concepts of mindfulness and meditation emphasise the connection of the body, soul and mind. Muslims, who pray five times a day, are more likely to tackle mental health better and are encouraged by intervention programs. (4) It allows them to disconnect with the worldly stresses for short periods of time during the day and connect oneself with God, the sole purpose of life. As humans, we have progressed in technology and making and understanding our physical world has advanced, yet when it comes to our innate emotions, we still feel that we are at the same level. This is because no matter how hard we try to change our physical being or surroundings, no tool has been invented to change our inner self. It is indeed no wonder that it is harder to change ourselves.

The world today we live in where technology is fast-paced, our mental health has been regressing both on the physical

and spiritual sense. There are now 1 in 4 people who have mental illness, most common one being anxiety and depression amongst adolescents and adults. (5) Often the affected individuals with mental health condition are medicated when actually more can be done with isolation and managing busy life. Children have brain development issues due to the early introduction of technology which hinders their development. Children should be out in the natural world exploring through their senses which can help with their creativity and overall wellbeing. The increase in screen time, is also affecting their physical wellbeing as we are heading into obesity epidemic. 1 in 3 children in primary school are considered overweight. (6)

Naturalists don't believe in the existence of God, because there is no scientific evidence to back this up. This is why we need to look at the creation and make observation of the complexities and intricacies which is evidence that there is indeed a creator.

Various people have said that "believing in all the scientific theories requires more faith than in God". This is true in a way that as science advances, there are some theories proving to be true and some false such as Einstein's Static Universe theory which mentions a universe that is fixed. However, modern science has proven that our universe is constantly expanding, which in fact is mentioned in the Holy Quran:

"And We have built the heaven with Our own hands, and verily We have vast powers. And the earth We have spread out, and how excellently do We prepare things!" (51:48-49). Science is also still heading towards the truth but not there yet.

Relationships

We are living in a generation of general consumerism, where most of our time, effort and love towards each other have shifted to "self" and isolation. More and more people especially men are becoming desensitised to women's body since naturalists believe that a women's body must be visualised, since it is a natural selection process and requires us to see the right proportion of women body, which leads to choosing a partner for fertility. If this is followed than no wonder only few particular women "get hit" on by men for sexual pleasure only. The pregnancy rate and single parenting rates are rising due to this. Women are becoming more vulnerable to changing their physical features to satisfy the standards of beauty set by society in which uniqueness has been erased. Most people want to fit into the societal standards and do not want to stand out with their uniqueness. This is impacting the generations so much so that they feel like the need to look the same. More people now tend to look the same with similar features, such as sharp nose, pouty lips, and exaggerated body features. These are endorsed by celebrities and instagrammers. It seems that soon we will not be able to identify individual by their physical features but perhaps by scanning codes instead. Spiritualism places emphasis on piety and modesty. This is because no amount of great

proportionality guarantees healthy children and more importantly stability, which is far more important for the proper mental health and development of children and the society. Naturalistic view on relationships is becoming more popular in our modern society, which is that more people are becoming promiscuous since they essentially believe that it is totally fine to see people as chairs to sit on or take them as test drives yet those very same people don't want to be the subjects. This shows the hypocrisy of the naturalistic inclinations too. Stability in long term relationship lasts due to emotional strength rather than physical strength alone. Physical strength diminishes overtime but emotional strength is long-lasting.

Parents overspending money on luxuries, alcohol etc. rather than providing the best physical and moral needs that their children require.

The easy accessibility of technology is exposing the younger generation to view more adult content. The rise in pornography has led to unhealthy relationships and false expectation of what intimacy is about. More young people are watching this content online and assuming that this is what intimacy is about. Pornography is demoralising and objectifies women. People feel that sex is an answer to get instant gratification to their desire but usually after physical gratification they are left empty. They want inner content; younger adults see sex as a normal daily part of their life, just like eating and drinking when it is actually a very intimate vulnerable part of the human emotion, which should be treaded on very carefully.

It is indeed very important to understand at the end that the problems of our society are created due to just the thought of only understanding our physical world via naturalism, because without spiritualism, we become a headless chicken running around causing chaos to anything and everything. Indeed spiritualism gives purpose to our existence and leads to a more fulfilling life.

"And I have not created the Jinn and the men but that they may worship Me".(51:57)

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Secularism: The Intended Intersection between Islam and Politics

Rabia Mir

Countries, like magnificent tapestries, are comprised of countless contributing threads. Undoubtedly, the one thread that is the most vibrant and arguably the most fickle is that of the population. Throughout history, nations have emerged that contain within their borders, people of various colors, cultures, and creeds. Different nations, within different periods of history, have developed different methods of government. In the past, typically a predominant religion became the primary form of governance. In more recent times, secularism has emerged as the ideal form of political governance.

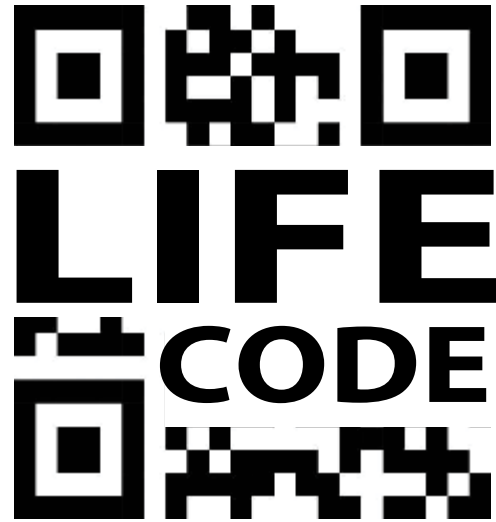
Secularism is a political philosophy which espouses the separation of church and state, i.e., it espouses the deliberate removal of religious ideology from the administration of state affairs.⁽¹⁾ As globalization embroils the world's population into a cauldron of diversity, secularism has become increasingly relevant. However, what is often questioned, particularly in light of the political policies and actions of current Muslim states, is Islam and its relationship to secularism.

Islam as a Code of Life:

Islam is often accused of being inherently opposed to secularism. One reason for this is that Islam prides itself on being a complete code of life and therefore it is often incorrectly understood that this code must manifest itself in the individual's political as well as personal realms. Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh) expounds at length upon this in his speech of June 3, 1991, in Suriname, highlighting that Islam, in fact, demands secularism as a political system. He stated:

"The very essence of secularism is that absolute justice must be practised regardless of the differences of faith, religion, colour, creed, and group. This, in essence, is the true definition of secularism, and this is exactly what the Holy Quran admonishes us to do in matters of state; how things should be done and how the state should be run. The Holy Quran says: 'No amount of enmity between you and any other people should permit you to deviate from absolute justice. Be always just, that is nearer to righteousness.'⁽¹⁾ Therefore, how could Islamic law be imposed upon non-Muslims; because it would be against justice and so many contradictions would arise?"⁽²⁾

Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh) goes on to state that if Shariah



law were to shape the political experience of Muslims only, whose version of Islam would be definitive in the formation of such an experience? Which sect? Whose interpretation within that sect? Moreover, if there is no compulsion in religion as per Quranic teaching then why Muslim citizens would require legislative compulsion to live out their faith? So why should they not choose to live in light of personal integrity and without state compulsion?⁽³⁾ In light of the above information, it can be safely assumed that legislatively imposing religious requirements upon various subsets of Muslims would be unjust. Moreover, the political implementation of such injustice would be against the Quranic injunction.

Further, the administration of justice must be recognized as nuanced and subject to socio-political realities. For example, it was the practice of the Holy Prophet (sa) to judge matters and dispense judgment as per the religious teaching of the perpetrator⁽³⁾. This practice of the Holy Prophet (sa) indicates that each individual must be judged based on her/his religious teaching and not on the religious teaching of another. An audience member, present at Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad's (rh) speech, inquired whether, in the modern world, such dispensation of justice (based on individual creed) could be accomplished without chaos. Hadhrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad (rh) responded: "Exactly...I am not proposing that every political government should have paraphernalia of legislation applicable to different religions. It is not possible. It is not practical."⁽³⁾

The reality that modern-day population concentrations and diversity do not allow for the dispensation of justice by way of particular creed leads to the conclusion that a secular system is a necessity, which is precisely recognized by Islam. If individuals are entitled to a justice system determined by their creed, but cannot indulge in such a thing, due to administrative and bureaucratic realities, then they must participate in the formation of a general creed to which all citizens can abide, regardless of religion. Effectively, this ecumenical creed would become constitution or legislation that would enable parties to participate in the formation of a justice system even as they are subject to it.

Islam's Vision and Execution of Social Justice:

Islam envisions a society characterized by social justice and offers guidelines for executing it. As such, it is believed that Islam demands ideology-based political engagement from its adherents. So, if secularism is a requirement of justice as envisioned by Islam, how does Islam intend to promote specific societal/social values, for social justice, without implementing an ideologically motivated state-apparatus?

Contrary to the popular opinion, social values are not shaped by legislation. In fact, it is legislation that is shaped by social values (). Moreover, social narratives generate social values, which (today) are perpetuated through media representation. In fact, media is crucial in shaping and changing mind-sets.

Reza Aslan highlights the uses of mass media in "normalizing" certain demographics through entertainment. He cites the airing of the show "Will and Grace" as the watershed moment when conversations surrounding the LGBTQ community shifted. Reza Aslan insists upon the necessity of such a watershed moment in addressing Islamophobia, i.e., "normalizing" the American Muslim population by depicting them in a relatable television show. He argues that this will also counter the years of media misrepresentation of Muslims in which they were depicted as villains (5). Tellingly, he argues that media cannot only shape viewpoints but shift the social tectonic plates, which determine the validity or unacceptability of specific groups and opinions.

Barrack Obama, former President of the USA, has also emphasized the importance of culture over politics. He stated in an interview with David Letterman that the efforts of the former First Lady, Michelle Obama, in engaging the public through conversations and cultural narratives were far more impactful than bringing about change through legislation and policy (6).

Therefore, a secularist state, regardless of the specific religious underpinning of its majority population or its ruling

class, must strive to create a just political environment, which enables and encourages safe dialogues between differing populations. These dialogues between demographics and within them (whether they are culture/religion/gender-based demographics) are what shape the social structure; social narrative; and the collective social experience. As such, should an "Islamic" state exist, it would only be Islamic insofar as its identity as determined by the majority is concerned. Beyond that, the state's purpose will be to protect the capacity of different actors and agents, of differing opinions, to share their worldviews. Purpose of this state will also be to implement education systems, which enable citizens to engage in dialogue and debate peacefully and respectfully and to remain considerate of differing opinions. The importance of this requirement is stated throughout the Holy Quran, one of these verses being the following:

"And if Allah had enforced His will, He would have made you all one people, but He wishes to try you by that which He has given you. Vie, then, with one another in good works. To Allah shall you all return; then will He inform you of that wherein you differed." (7)

The scripture that recognizes differences in opinion and acknowledges that such differences are to be expected does not allow for a political state, which strives to erase such differences and wash them all in one stripe, that of Islam. Thus, secularism is a requirement of an Islamic socio-political vision and execution of social justice.



Political Ramifications of Theological versus Secular Leadership:

Islamic history demonstrates the importance and efficacy of secularism over theological rule. Consider, for example, the Mughal empire. The Mughal Emperors Babar and Akbar tolerated religious diversity. They ruled over South Asia at separate times, and the sensitivities and needs of the Hindus were taken into consideration when they ruled over them.

Babar brought to South Asia “a broad-minded confident Islam from Central Asia” (8). He protected the temples that existed, encouraged the building of more temples and prohibited the killing of cows (an animal that was sacred for his Hindu subjects). Akbar was one of the most popular and beloved Mughal emperors. He worked hard to win over the hearts and minds of the Hindus, allowing them to occupy high positions within the government administration. He also believed that all religions were to be treated equally by the emperor and allowed Hindus to regulate themselves according to their own beliefs (8).

These two secular rulers produced a mighty and prosperous empire that lasted for more than 300 years.

The final Mughal emperor was Aurungzeb who ended the policy of religious tolerance. His military might allowed the expansion of the empire; he was not able to manage the internal social instabilities, which emerged as a result of his intolerance (8). Islamic history itself dictates that secularism is not only an aspect of political wisdom but a necessity of socio-political success and stability. Leadership that ignores the nuanced identity of its subjects usually finds itself annihilated. Arguably, the Mughal empire ended with Aurungzeb for this very reason.



Conclusion

Not only does Islam promote a theory of secularism but Islamic scripture and Islamic history vouch for its importance. Islam is indeed a socio-political ideology which espouses a vision of socio-political justice. Islam upholds justice and as such upholds the idea of a secular state, which allows for different cultures, creeds, and color to co-exist peacefully and flourish overall. The notion that Islam somehow forces religious precepts upon Muslim or non-Muslim subjects is a colossally bogus claim as the Holy Quran explicitly states: “There should be no compulsion in religion” (9). Islam demands that its adherents act with justice towards one another and towards others. Further, it strives to formulate cultural narratives rather than impose political viewpoints. In reality, Islam is a religion that not only promotes secularism but also embodies secularist values.

Today Islam is donned in a cloak of violence. The corrupt political policies and actions of current Muslim states are in stark contrast to the justice and tolerance oriented Islamic empires of the past. How can a single ideology (any ideology) don such different cloaks in different periods in history? That is the question of our time and Muslim leaders, as well as Umah, need to think and ponder on this question.

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Does Religion incite Violence?

Khalida Jamilah

From the Crusades to the rise of ISIS, religions are often associated with evil, violence and illogical concept. In their recently published book "Encyclopedia of Wars," authors Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod document the history of recorded warfare. From their list of 1,763 wars only 123 have been classified to involve a religious cause. This means only about six percent are religious cause.(1) According to Criminal Psychology journal, there are four overlapping factors such as biological, situational, socialization and cognitive.

According to World Health Organization (WHO) in 1996, "violence is the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person , or a group or community, that is either results in or has a likelihood of resulting injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation." (2)

The biological factors refer to the different array of neurological, physiological , or chemical influences on aggression and violence. Recent advances in the neurosciences have revealed that biological factors, interacting with the social environment , may have some significant influences on child development. The exact nature of these influences remains widely unknown.

Moreover, child development researchers have found links between aggression and brain damage resulting from a different environmental factors. These include (1) toxic materials found in the environment (e.g. paint), (2) traumatic head injury (e.g. as the result of child abuse or accident), (3) dietary deficiencies (especially prenatal) , (4) alcohol and drug ingestion by the mother during critical fetal developmental stages , and (5) birth trauma.

Once the shortfalls occur , attempts to remove or remedy the biological cause may include active biological treatment in the form of medication. However, more importantly is the supportive and competent social environment has also been found to neutralize or reduce the effects that these biological factors exert on any propensity toward violence. (3)

Situational factors refer to the characteristics of the environment, such as stress or aggression in others, that encourage or engender violent behavior. Almost any unpleasant stimuli such as continuous loud noise ; unpleasant smells and crowded, unpleasant living conditions—can provoke aggression and violence in those persons submitted to such conditions.

Neighborhoods, school, family and peers can all be conducive to the development of violent behavior. The presence of weapons increases the chances that the conflict will occur in the first place and that it will have deadly consequences once it does occur. (4)



Socialization factors mean those processes through which a person learns patterns of thinking, behavior, and feeling from his or her early life experiences. Socialization also signifies the process by which a child learns the scripts for specific social behavior, along with rules, attitudes, values, and norms that guide interactions with others. Furthermore, children can learn as much from observing significant or observing significant or admired others in their environment as from their own experiences. Aggressive, antisocial, and violent behaviors are often learned from significant others including TV, movie or fictional characters and are held in reserve for response to specific social situations. (5)

Cognitive factors refer to the ideas, beliefs, and patterns of thinking that emerge as a result of interactions with the world during a person's lifetime. Violent individuals have different ways of processing and interpreting that information. They tend to perceive hostility in others when there is no hostility.

This tendency also called hostile attribution bias. Violent people tend to think that aggression is the most effective solutions to solve any conflicts. (6)

Thus, from the explanation above it is clear that religion does not incite violence. History simply does not support the hypothesis that religion is the major cause of conflict. The wars of the ancient world were rarely, if ever, based on religion. These wars were for territorial conquest, to control borders, secure trade routes, or respond to an internal challenge to political authority. Now let's ponder, if all religions do not exist at all, will all conflicts eradicate? Surely no, because conflicts are part of human nature.

The founder of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community, the Promised Messiah (as) and states the definition and the purpose of religion :

"What is religion? It is the path one adopts for oneself. In reality everyone has a religion or creed. An irreligious person who does not believe God exists still has to choose a path to follow, which in essence is their religion. However one should stop to think whether the path they have chosen in life truly gives them everlasting happiness, peace and tranquility ? (This question should be posed to rejecters of religion). Religion is only a general word. It means the path to one treads on and it is not a word that exclusively applies to faith. Experts in the arts, sciences, physics, medicine, astronomy and any field of knowledge also have canons, doctrines and beliefs. However it is certainty that these will not provide salvation to anyone. Just as a soul requires a body and words need meaning, so too does mankind stand in need of religion." (7)

Moreover, Islam clearly explains that true Muslims discharge two overarching rights upon which religion is based—the rights due to God and the rights due to God's creation. People can fulfill the rights to fellow human being when they shows true sympathy and compassion to one another, shares in their pain and suffering and forgives and overlooks their faults.



However, we sometimes hear that the problem is not "radical Islam" but really perhaps even Islam itself. Why do they hate us, why are they violent, why do they engage in guerilla war or terrorism? No doubt that in this divided world, Islam and Muslim synonymous with violence, terrorism, extremism and radicalization. Hence the term Islamic terrorism exists because people like ISIS and Al Qaeda believe Islam instructs them to kill non-Muslim or Islam must be the law of the land.

Terrorism is a global problem that needs to be studied in larger perspective. There is no single or universal accepted definition. The FBI defines terrorism as: "... the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives."

The Department of Defense defines terrorism as: "... the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."

The State Department defines terrorism as an activity, directed against persons involving violent acts or acts dangerous to human life which would be a criminal violation if committed within the jurisdiction of the U.S.; and is intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by assassination or kidnapping. ... to include the use of certain weapons of mass destruction.(8)



Religious terrorists use violence to further what they see as divinely commanded purposes, often targeting broad categories in an attempt to pursue their goals. Religious terrorists can sanction "almost limitless violence against a virtually open-ended category of targets: that is, anyone who is not a member of the terrorists' religion or religious sect. (9)

Of course a question that naturally arises is that if these are Islam's authentic teachings then why do we find certain Muslim groups like ISIS, Al-Qaeda or individuals like Usama bin Laden perpetrating cruelties or committing horrific attacks targeting both their fellow Muslims and also non-Muslims? This very question has already been answered in a prophecy made by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) more than 1400 years ago. He clearly foretold that a time would come when the vast majority of Muslims would move far away from Islam's original teachings (Mishkat). (10)

The prophecy of prophet Muhammad (sa) can be seen when a French journalist Didier Francois -- who spent over 10 months as the prisoner of ISIS in Syria said that ISIS members never had discussion about religion. It was political discussion. He said, "It was more hammering what they were believing than teaching us about the Quran. Because it has nothing to do with the Quran." "We didn't even have the Quran; they didn't want even to give us a Quran." (11)

Similarly, the Guardian magazine published a study conducted by British Intelligence MI-5 about terrorism. It says. "Far from being religious zealots, a large number of those involved in terrorism do not practice their faith regularly. Many lack religious literacy and could actually be regarded as religious novices. Very few have been brought up in strongly religious households, and there is a higher than average proportion of converts. Some are involved in drug-taking, drinking alcohol and visiting prostitutes." Surprisingly, MI5 adds there is evidence that a well-established religious identity actually protects against violent radicalization. (12)

Thus it is crystal clear that Islamic terrorists actors do not represent Islam because the Holy Quran gave states, "Verily, Allah enjoins justice, and the doing of good to others; and giving like kindred; and forbids indecency and manifest evil and transgression. He admonishes you that you may take heed." (16:91). (13) Clearly, a true Muslim will never even incite a fear to others both to Muslim and non-Muslims. Thus Islamic terrorism is a wrong term and exists as a result of political agenda from the enemy of Islam. Muslim who becomes a terrorist clearly do not represent the true Islamic teachings.

Islam instructs its followers to show true sympathy and compassion to God's creatures, shares in their pain and suffering and forgives and overlooks their faults. This is religion as explained by Islam and so clearly Islam does not teach to kill and shed blood. In fact no true religion permits violence to the innocence.

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Islamism -- the Political Islam

Zia H Shah MD

It was 8th of June, 632 CE, Muhammad (sa) had passed away. Nobody around him seemed able to acknowledge it. Refusal to accept the death of Muhammad (sa) was strange blindness on their part, regardless of the reasons. Muhammad (as) was 63 years old, after all, long life for his time. He was severely wounded in the battle of Uhud some seven years ago, from which he had completely recovered and survived no fewer than three assassination attempts that as far as we know from the history. Perhaps those closest to him, who had seen the pervasive Providence of God play out in his life, could not fathom, how a minor illness could bring him down. They required some explanation and quotation from the Quran to comprehend the tragedy.

The Quranic revelation had promised the prophet security from his enemies: "O Messenger! Convey to the people what has been revealed to thee from thy Lord; and if thou do it not, thou hast not conveyed His Message at all. And Allah will protect thee from men. Surely, Allah guides not the disbelieving people."(1)

The prophet of Islam could not be taken down by his enemies; this was God's unconditional promise. However, the same was not true for the three of the four Caliphs, who immediately followed him and are titled the four "Righteous Caliphs." This distinction between the prophet and what followed stands out very dramatically. Abu Bakr (ra), the first Caliph, was the only one to die of natural causes. Umar (ra), Uthman (ra), and Ali (ra) who followed him were all martyred. In this historical contrast lies the key to understanding Islam and its role in our personal lives and our politics.

During the lifetime of the prophet Muhammad (sa), revelation took center stage and managed all aspects of human existence. The divine revelation polished human wisdom and logic, so that after his life, wisdom, logic, the Quran and his practices and the human experiences, can become a guide for the humanity.

Lesley Hazleton, who is a British-American author whose work focuses on the vast and volatile arena in which politics and religion intersect, has a well-written book: "After the Prophet: The Epic Story of the Shia-Sunni Split in Islam." In this gripping narrative history, Hazleton tells the tragic story at the heart of the ongoing rivalry between the Sunni and Shia branches of Islam, a rift that dominates the news now more than ever.



Lesley Hazleton

Lesley Hazleton describes, how Hazrat Aisha (ra), the wife of the prophet, was exonerated after someone had slandered her when she was accidentally left behind a traveling caravan and had to travel back with a young Muslim, who was also delayed for some other reason. Lesley Hazleton writes:

"After three weeks of indecision, Muhammad went to Abu Bakr's house to question Aisha himself. There, even as she swore her innocence yet again, he went into a prophetic trance. As she would tell it, 'The Prophet was wrapped in his garment and a leather cushion was put under his head.... Then he recovered and sat up and drops of water fell from him like rain on a winter day, and he began to wipe the sweat from his brow, saying, 'Good news, Aisha! God has sent down word of your innocence.'

It was a divine revelation, perfectly timed. That same day Muhammad (sa) proclaimed it in public, in the words that are now part of Chapter 24 of the Quran:

"The slanderers were a small group among you, and shall be punished. But why, when you heard it, did faithful men and women not think the best and say, 'This is a manifest lie?' If the slanderers had even produced four witnesses! But they produced no witnesses, so they are liars in the eyes of God. ... Why did you think nothing of repeating what others with no knowledge had said, thinking it a light matter when in the

eyes of God it was a serious one? Why did you not say, 'This is a monstrous slander'? God commands the faithful never to do such a thing again.

It was a glorious exoneration of Aisha, and all the more powerful in that it demanded not one but all of four people to contradict her word. Unless there were four witnesses to an illegal sexual act, it said, the accused was blameless, and the false accusers were the ones to be punished.”(2)

The Quranic revelation had defined that honor of every person is sacred and cannot be played with. For a wronged woman, Hazrat Aisha (ra) and the early Muslims, there could have been no better teaching or outcome. These same verses have come to haunt the present day Muslims as the teaching has been cruelly turned around and used by conservative clerics to do the opposite of what was initially intended: not to exonerate a woman but to blame women, who are raped.(3 , 4)

If accusers of adultery are unable to produce four eyewitnesses of the crime, they should be punished for slander and adultery. Such myopic reading of the Quran does not allow the scientific developments, which now allow DNA testing and a sperm analysis for foolproof ways to catch the guilty. Islamism is an obsession with the Quranic text or the early Islamic history, without the wisdom to understand the context and the changing circumstances, a dogmatic refusal to benefit from all the human experiences, wisdom, science, and technology that have developed since. Islamism is a myopic reading to serve the political goals of some, whether grounded in ignorance, leader worship, racism, or self-serving conspiracies.

In her book, Hazelton describes the political struggle in the seventh century. This struggle is still relevant today, despite some of the liberties that she appears to have taken with the history or storytelling, in understanding Islamism, if we can remember George Santayana's words: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

What I took from her book is that the Holy Quran has to be read in the context of the time, like the verses about the four eyewitnesses.(5,6) Consider an additional example, that of the Hajj, in the time of the prophet, the pilgrims were supposed to sacrifice animals during the proceedings of the Hajj rituals, as mentioned in Surah Hajj: “And among the sacred Signs of Allah We have appointed for you the sacrificial camels. In them there is much good for you. So mention the name of Allah over them as they stand tied up in lines. And when they fall down dead on their sides, eat thereof and feed him who is needy but contented and him who supplicates. Thus have We subjected them to you, that you may be thankful.”(7) The sacrifice of an animal is no longer physically possible, during the days of the pilgrim, as 3 to 4 million pilgrims perform Hajj these days.

Slavery was discouraged by Islam, even though allowed in the context of the seventh century, and there are several verses of the holy Quran dealing with the issue and with the marriage of the slaves. Every contemporary or recent commentator of the holy Quran believes that slavery was only in the context of the past and those verses are not enforceable in the present day context. However, many of these commentators do not have the courage to apply the same formula of context to many of the other verses of the Quran and push Islamism or Shariah Laws in the public domain in this day and age.



“And among the sacred Signs of Allah We have appointed for you the sacrificial camels. In them there is much good for you. So mention the name of Allah over them as they stand tied up in lines. And when they fall down dead on their sides, eat thereof and feed him who is needy but contented and him who supplicates. Thus have We subjected them to you, that you may be thankful”

Rather than going on the convoluted path of Islamism, our love for Islam should translate into a zeal for compassion and justice, which leads us towards human rights and human freedoms rather than any specific political system. The fact of the matter is that there is no political system in Islam and many Muslim scholars have written about that.

Prophet Muhammad (sa) linked the sanctity of human rights to the human appreciation of sacredness. At the times of his farewell address, during his last Hajj, he addressed a sobbing and spellbound crowd of pilgrims: "Even as this month is sacred, this land inviolate, and this day holy, so has God made the lives, property, and honor of every man sacred. To take any man's life or his property, or attack his honor, is as unjust and wrong as to violate the sacredness of this day, this month, and this territory." (8) The echoes of the words would reverberate, with deep emotional conviction, for centuries to come in the known world. Our focus in the 21st century should be on this message rather than on an obsession with some rule or detail, which could be misunderstood or be out of its context.

Islamism or the political Islam is not a limited subject to be covered in one short article. In every, so-called Muslim country, it takes a life and struggle of its own. In the Muslim Times, a Blog Fostering Universal Brotherhood, we have collected a large number of articles on this theme, as we promote secularism in every country of the world and some are linked here, in the references (9,10,11,12,13,14,15, and 16).

Islamism or the politics of the right-wing parties, as they push their agenda, wrapped in religious dressings, is not unique to the Muslim world. The same trend can be seen in Hinduism, Judaism, and Christianity in the countries, where they are in the majority. Sometimes it is easier to recognize a weakness in others than in oneself. With this in mind, for the benefit of the Muslim audience, a few articles promoting secularism in India, Israel, Europe, and the USA are available in the references 17 to 23 listed below (17,18,19,20,21,22, and 23).

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The Origin of the Conflict between Sunni and Shia Muslims

Dr. Muhammad Zafar Iqbal

It is the history of all religions that impurities and differences appear with time that lead to divisions. All the major world religions Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam, have evolved into different denominations over the course of time.

In the Holy Qur'an is stated: "And that man will have nothing but what he strives for." (1)

It is after unremitting, incessant, and persistent striving, accompanied by noble ideals and lofty principles, that one can fully achieve the object of one's quest.

At the dawn of Islam, Muslims were inspired and motivated by the message of the new faith and the magnetic personality of its Messenger, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa). Despite being few in number and having a scarcity of means, they accomplished so much in so little time against so many odds that even today, this surprises historians.

The future of Islam was foretold by the Holy Prophet (sa) himself in the following Hadith, "Prophethood shall remain among you as long as Allah wills. He will bring about its end and follow it with Khilafat on the precepts of the Prophethood for as long as He shall will and then bring about its end. A tyrannical monarchy will then follow and will remain as long as Allah shall will and then it will end. There shall follow after that monarchical despotism to last as long as Allah wills and come to an end upon His decree. There will then emerge Khilafat on the precept of Prophethood. The Holy Prophet said no more." (2)

How did conflicts start in Islam?

Some say that Hazrat Usman (ra) introduced innovations in the faith and allegations of nepotism against him caused an uproar among the Muslims. Others assert that Hazrat Ali (ra) secretly conspired to acquire Khilafat and had Hazrat Usman (ra) killed by creating hostility against him so that he could become the Khalifa himself. However, both of these notions are untrue. Hazrat Usman (ra) and Hazrat Ali (ra) are entirely free from the blemish of such allegations. Both were companions of the Holy Prophet (sa) and had learned the primary tenant of Islam, namely "obedience to the authority" from the Holy Prophet (sa) himself.

Others surmise that the seeds of dissension were sown even during the time of the Holy Prophet (sa) as a result of the unfortunate incident of the loss of a necklace of Hazrat Aisha (ra) on the return journey from an expedition. Hazrat Aisha (ra) was

accidentally left behind by the caravan she was traveling with. She had walked quite far away from the caravan in search of her missing necklace. Another Muslim warrior, Safwan, was also left behind by the caravan for some reason and on seeing Hazrat Aisha (ra) resting under a tree, got off his camel and offered to give it to her so she could ride back to Medina. Both of them arrived several hours after the main caravan arrived at Medina. The Holy Prophet (sa) was displeased about the incident and asked Hazrat Ali's advice. Hazrat Ali (ra) said, "There are many women like her "God has freed you from constraints. She may easily be replaced." (3)

Some historians state that this incident and some other minor issues became a foundation for a rift between Hazrat Aisha (ra) and Hazrat Ali (ra).

Other historians allege that since Hazrat Usman (ra) reduced the annual pension of Hazrat Aisha (ra) to make it the same as other "Mothers of the Faithful" (a title for the wives of the Holy Prophet (sa)), Hazrat Aisha (ra) was upset with Hazrat Usman (ra) and some individuals took advantage of this situation to put a wedge between them. (3)

These theories of the split are all baseless and imaginary accusations. In reality, there were other causes for this revolt. The following four reasons formed the basis of the source of conflict.

Hazrat Mirza Bashiruddin Mahmood Ahmad (ra) provides four reasons for the split in Islam in his book "The Outset of Dissension in Islam" (4). Briefly, these reasons are:

First Reason:

Some Muslims who had not fully embraced the new faith became envious upon witnessing the honor, status, success, and authority of the Companions of the Holy Prophet (sa). Hence, these individuals continued to burn inside with jealousy.

Second Reason:

Typically, a government that receives authority through the public vote is compelled to respect the public opinion. However, in a religious state, the matter is quite the opposite, where the authority is provided by God the Exalted, and the administration is obligated to prevent people from deviating from religious laws etc. Many individuals who had embraced Islam

and were not able to spend time in the company of the Holy Prophet (sa) did not understand this concept of governance.

Third Reason:

Hundreds and thousands of individuals joined Islam when the Muslim armies conquered Persia, Syria, and Egypt. The number of new converts to Islam multiplied rapidly, plus no satisfactory arrangement was made for their education and training. This lack of proper training and understanding of the religious governance caused people to become infuriated. They started to raise objections against the Khalifa and his officials when the slightest punishment was imposed by the Khalifa to maintain the boundaries of the Sharia.

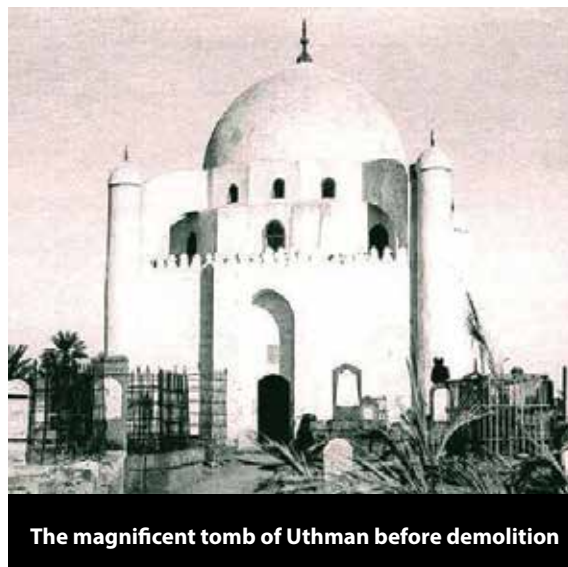
Fourth Reason:

Islam progressed at such an extraordinary pace that in the beginning, its opponents were unable to comprehend this. The Persian and Byzantine Empires were shattered into pieces with a single blow from the strike of the Prophet Muhammad (sa).

After some time, these opponents started thinking how to weaken and ultimately destroy Islam. They felt that this could only be done under the disguise of friendship and infiltrating Muslim Umma as Muslims.

In the seventh year of Hazrat Usman's (ra) Khilafat, a campaign was started against the Companions of the Holy Prophet (sa) and various governors loyal to Hazrat Usman (ra). The following account is the brief history leading up to the eventual martyrdom of Hazrat Usman (ra).

Abdullah bin Saba was a Jew, also known as Ibnus-Sauda. He was a resident of Yemen and was an extremely cunning person. Upon witnessing the growing success of Islam, he 'converted' to Islam during the Khilafat of Hazrat Usman (ra) with the objective of creating a rift among the Muslims. He toured Medina, Basra, Kufa, Damascus and Fustat. He searched for people who had been punished by the Khalifa and were therefore displeased with the State. For example, on the orders of Hazrat Usman (ra), a band of robbers was executed in Kufa by Governor Walid bin Utbah. The fathers of these young men wanted revenge. Abdullah bin Saba would visit such people and stay with them to gain their trust. First, he went to Basra and stayed with Hakim bin Jabalah, a robber who was under house arrest. He began to gather people of his mentality and formed parties in several places: Kufa, Basra, Syria, and Egypt. These mischief-makers started complaining about the Governors of Kufa, Basra, and Egypt. Hazrat Usman (ra) conducted an independent inquiry about the matter and found no issues, although he did replace the Governor of Kufa twice: Walid bin Utbah was replaced by Sa'id bin Al-'As, who was then replaced by Abu Musa Al Ash'ari.



The magnificent tomb of Uthman before demolition

To achieve their ultimate objective, the troublemakers began openly accusing Hazrat Usman (ra) of the concocted issues and, with large parties of mischief-mongers from Kufa, Basra, and Egypt, they headed for Medina. The Medinites decided to confront them outside the city. The rebels avoided confrontation and instead they tried to meet with the wives of the Holy Prophet (sa), and with Hazrat Ali (ra), Hazrat Talha (ra), and Hazrat Zubair (ra), but without success.

In a final attempt to achieve their goal, a group from Egypt came to Hazrat Ali (ra) and offered to pledge allegiance to him as Khalifa. He rebuked them harshly, saying "All pious people know that the Holy Prophet (sa) has foretold of the armies that would set up camp in Dhul-Marwah and Dhul-Khashab (where the rebels had set up camp), and then invoked a curse upon them. Hence, may God ruin you! Be Gone!" (3) They replied, "Very well, we shall return." and went back to their camp. Another group from Basra went to Hazrat Talha (ra), and one from Kufa to Hazrat Zubair (ra) for the same purpose and they received the same response.

The rebels left for their homes, only to return suddenly and besiege Medina, the mosque, and the house of Hazrat Usman (ra). The rebels warned the residents of Medina not to leave their homes, nor to gather at any public place. When asked about their sudden return, the rebels responded that they found a letter from a courier written to the Governor of Egypt by Hazrat Usman (ra) with an order to punish the rebels. In fact, the rebels had forged this letter. For almost three weeks, the rebels tried their best to convince Hazrat Usman (ra) to step down from the Khilafat, but to no avail. Eventually, Hazrat Usman (ra) wrote to the different governors for help asking them to send their armies.

At this, the rebels became afraid. They martyred Hazrat Usman (ra) and convinced Hazrat Ali (ra) to accept their pledge of allegiance. Hazrat Aisha (ra) was in Mecca. She demanded from Hazrat Ali (ra) that he punish the rebels right away. Hazrat Ali's view was that his priority must be to establish peace in the State. Both fought a fierce battle known as the Battle of the Camel, near Kufa. The army of Hazrat Aisha (ra) was defeated; two prominent companions of the Holy Prophet (sa), Hazrat Talha (ra) and Hazrat Zubair (ra), were killed. Hazrat Ali (ra) respectfully sent Hazrat Aisha (ra) to Medina.

The Governor of Syria, Muawiya, refused to accept Hazrat Ali (ra) as Khalifa. Both armies fought a fierce battle in 657 CE at a place called Siffin. The army of Hazrat Ali (ra) was winning, but Muawiya's army played a trick. They impaled copies of the Qur'an on their spears, and contrary to Hazrat Ali's (ra) orders, his army stopped fighting. Hazrat Ali (ra) came back to Kufa. The Kufans then turned back and blamed Hazrat Ali (ra) for the apparent defeat. A group of Khawariji individuals conspired to put an end to the disorder in their own way. One Khawariji martyred Hazrat Ali (ra) as he was going to the mosque to offer the Fajr (dawn) prayer.

At this time the Kufans offered the pledge of allegiance and Khilafat to Hazrat Hassan (ra), Hazrat Ali's son and the maternal grandson of the Holy Prophet (sa). Hazrat Muawiya (ra) offered him an attractive compensation in return for relinquishing his right to Khilafat. Hazrat Hassan (ra) accepted Muawiya's offer and settled in Medina where, years later, he died of poisoning at the hand of his wife.

Ten years later a history-changing incident took place at Karbala during which Hazrat Hussain (ra), younger son of Hazrat Ali (ra) and maternal grandson of the Holy Prophet (sa), along with his immediate family and an army of 72 people were martyred. This incident resulted in the division of Muslims into two major sects: Sunnis and Shias. The Sunni sect accounted for 85 % of the Muslims, and the Shia sect accounted for 15% of the Muslims. There are now further subdivisions among Sunnis and Shias. At present, there are more than 72 sects within Islam. (3)

Sunni Muslims accept the authority and status of the first four rightly-guided Khalifas and the comprehensive system of Islamic law, the Sharia. There are four distinct orthodox law schools recognized by the Sunnis. These are the Maliki, Hanafi, Shafi, and Hanbali.

Shia Muslims trace their origin to political developments dating back to the period of Hazrat Usman (ra). At the election of Hazrat Usman (ra) to Khilafat, the supporters of Hazrat Ali (ra) claimed that the election was a "conspiracy" to withhold the Khilafat from the Prophet's own family. The election of Hazrat Usman (ra) to Khilafat was the first seed of dissension which

appeared in Islam and eventually divided the otherwise united community. (5)

The event of Ghadir Khumm:

While returning from his last pilgrimage, the Prophet (sa) stopped at Ghadir Khumm on Dhil-Hijjah 18, 10 A.H. and gave a long sermon. Then he took Ali (ra) by the hand and declared, "Whomever's master I am, this Ali (ra) is also his master." (6) Based on this narration, the Shia community believes that the right to Khilafat belonged only to Hazrat Ali (ra). They do not believe in the Khilafat of Hazrat Abu Bakr (ra), Hazrat Umar (ra), or Hazrat Usman (ra).

Conclusion:

Whatever the reasons may be, the Shia-Sunni division in Islam has caused irreparable damage to the faith and to the Umma (Muslim community). Opponents of Islam have exploited this split to their advantage. Even today, the Sunni majority Saudi Arabia and Shia majority Iran are at odds and fighting proxy wars in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen. The Saudi fundamentalist brand of Sunni-ism, known as Wahhabism, is being exported to different Asian and African Muslim states. War-torn nations are going through strife, loss of lives, famine, economic, and social chaos.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) had foretold this degradation of the Muslim faith and Umma. He also provided a solution to this problem in the Hadith quoted at the beginning of this article. There is no doubt that the solution lies solely in acceptance of the Imam of the age, Mahdi and Messiah, Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian (as), to become united as one Umma again.

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Alcoholism and Gambling: A Challenge to Islam in the West

Attiya T. Ghani



Drinking, gambling, dancing and other modes of happiness are considered harmless pursuits by Western society. These societies present consumption of alcohol and gambling as an essential part of their culture. The modes of interpretation change from culture to culture but the basic features remain the same. These worldly pleasures no longer remain safe but become painful tasks which sometimes break the peace and harmony of society. Such societies become difficult to maintain because a considerable portion of their wealth continues to be wasted and flushed down the drain. Broken homes and ruined marriages appear as by-products of these social ills. Peace of family life vanishes and agony grows. Depression and frustration prevails and murder, theft, fraud, and crime rate increase with both gambling and drinking.

These evils can get out of hand. Some go for the excitement of get-rich-quick fantasies accompanied by expectations of "happily ever after" and a life of indulgence. For others, alcohol is a mind-numbing experience and gambling is pushing coins into a slot as a way of detaching from one's troubled atmosphere. Such social evils eventually run their lives completely until they lose control and end up destroying their work, family, and intimate relations, always under the impression that this is the last time they will indulge in such destructive behavior.

When people participate in activities like drinking and gambling the behaviors become the focus of leisure entertainment. Even Muslims living in the Western nations face the dilemma of how to adapt this culture without compromising

deeply-held religious beliefs and traditions. Talking about such cultures one may be misled to believe that these vain pleasures are the sole purpose of man's creation. However, the Holy Qur'an presents it in this way: "In the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alternation of the night and the day there are indeed Signs for men of understanding. Those who remember God standing, sitting and lying on their sides and ponder over the creation of the heavens and the earth; and say, 'Our Lord Thou hast not created this universe in vain. Holy art Thou; save us, then, from the punishment of the Fire' (1).

The lesson implied in the creation of the heavens and the earth and in the alteration of night and day is both for spiritual and temporal progress and that if he acts righteously, his period of darkness and affliction must be followed by one of sunshine and happiness. When man ponders over the spiritual implication of the physical creation of this universe, he is impressed by the great wisdom of its Creator, and from the depth of his heart he cries out loud: "Our Lord, Thou hast not created this universe in vain." According to the Holy Qur'an man has been created to achieve nearness to God, the Creator. As stated in the Quran: "And I have not created the jinn and the men but that they may worship me" (2).

The primary significance of the word "worship" is to subject oneself to a strict spiritual discipline, working with full capacity, in perfect harmony with and in obedience of Divine commandments so that man can develop His attributes in himself. This is the sole object of man's creation - to worship the Creator with sincerity, truth and devotion. This great and noble objective can not be achieved by committing sins or acting disobedient to the Lord. As God states in the Holy Qur'an, "They ask thee concerning wine and games of chance. Say, in both there is a great sin and harm..." (3).

In this verse the Arabic word, 'ithm' has been used twice which means sin, crime or something wrong or exceeding the limits, or an act of disobedience that is punishable, or an act or a thought that prevents one from doing good deeds or any illegal action. The Holy Qur'an used the phrase, 'great sin' only for drinking and gambling. Regarding this Khalifatul Masih V (aba) in one of his Friday sermons said, "Sins like gambling and alcohol consumption are known as great sin

which is a sin that repeatedly incites one to commit sin. Alcohol and gambling are causing destruction in the Muslim world. These sins take people away from God and once man goes away from God it leads to destruction" (4).

Alcohol is also known as the mother of all ills (ummul khabais). Gambling has also done untold evil to people by making them lose money that could be used for good purposes or even the necessities of life. Wealth is gifted to us by God to be used for good, not evil. Anyone seeking to obey God should not be involved in gambling. The Holy Qur'an states, "O ye who believe! Wine and the game of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an abomination of Satan's handiwork. So, shun each one of them that you may prosper. Satan seeks only to create enmity and hatred among you by means of wine and the game of chance, and to keep you back from the remembrance of God and from Prayer. Then will you keep back?" (5)

Through this verse we can understand that he who drinks wine is at the same level as: One who worships idols by associating them with God, makes them dirt, and makes them work of Satan. After stating that the four things mentioned in the previous verse are all abominations in one sense or another, the present verse is confined to two of them—wine and games of chance—and gives additional reasons to shun them. These reasons rest on political, social, spiritual and socio-religious grounds.

Many gamblers borrow from their families, and from the bank. Pressure to repay the debts and unpleasant encounters with criminal elements become an incentive to continue gambling, with the hope of winning enough to wipe out the debt resulting from previous gambling. Family and friends feel often that they have no choice but to provide financial assistance to the gambler in order to keep him safe.

The detrimental consequences related to gambling and alcoholism are proofs that these ills are reasons for numerous problems in the society. Some people including Muslims living in the West have a convenient rationalization. Depending upon its usage they divide the reality into two parts, moderate use and excessive use and keep trying to blame all problems on excessive use, while saluting the recreational value of moderate use and its other benefits. This is clearly denying any possible relationship between moderate and excessive use. Alcohol is not only a great wastage of money but also causes several health issues such as ulcers, stomach cancer, neurological and digestive disorders and liver ailments. The twin-evils of liquor and gambling have ruined innumerable lives, shattered multitudes of homes, and caused more misery to mankind than all other vices put

together.

The Holy Qur'an has been revealed by the All-Knowing God. Therefore, its teachings when properly understood by human mind are above criticism and any question. The authority of the verses of the Holy Qur'an has to stand the test of time and analysis of accurate methods of science if the above statements are indeed true. The Qur'an has surely maintained its validity through such testing. In the medical field several teachings of the Qur'an have been proven accurate and helpful.

Alcoholism and gambling are the deeds, the evil of which is hidden from man and Satan is on the lookout as to when he can deceive the son of Adam, and make him inclined to these kinds of sins and in such a beautiful way present those sins to him, making them appear charming that he does not conceive it to be wrong but in fact considers it to be good and then begin to indulge in these things. Indulgence in liquor and gambling does not take very long to become excessive and then once he is drowned in those evils he should continue to occupy himself with those actions. As it is evident from this Qur'anic verse, "Say, My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, open or secret and sin and wrongful transgression and that you associate with God that for which He has sent down no authority, and that you say of God what you know not" (6). Thus God the Exalted, has alerted us and told us to save ourselves from these things, which are forbidden and that if you do them they will make you subject to the punishment from God. Therefore, regardless of amount of alcohol consumption, the Holy Qur'an clearly tells believers to avoid alcohol completely or anything that would intoxicate the mind.

Muslims should clearly understand that in all of these verses, God, The Exalted, has made statements very clear. All kinds of wrong and Satanic deeds are forbidden in Islam. To live as a believer, one should always be searching for those actions that lead one to follow the paths of righteousness; and be aware and alert to those actions that will take one away from these righteous paths and take one away from God Almighty.

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Mistreatment of Women: Islamic Solutions to a Social Problem

Anser Ahmad

Possibly one of the most talked about issues in the past year was the emergence of incidents of sexual assault as reported by women. The media brought to light the ongoing prevalence of sexual harassment in the film industry but also opened up a broader discussion on the double standard between the genders, covering everything from why women are targeted, why colleagues had not spoken out for coworkers, and why there was little condemnation of the male perpetrators.

In the streets of London, Bangladesh, Washington, or Cairo, the recent outpouring of stories from women using #MeToo and its many iterations has shown the uniformity of the problem, irrespective of the country, culture, or religion, the world has made one thing clear, that is, sexual harassment is everywhere and has been for centuries.

The West's predicament

In 2017, it was made clear that the present day mistreatment of women is not unique to the film industry or to the workplace. According to the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted in 2006, which includes crimes that were not reported to the police, 232,960 women in the USA were raped or sexually assaulted, which is more than 600 women every day.⁽¹⁾ The European Union (EU) fares no better. According to a recent report, the "European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), violence against women, an EU-wide survey," in-person interviews were conducted of 42,000 randomly selected women across the 28 EU member states. Based on the results, one in three women had reported some form of physical or sexual abuse since the age of 15.⁽²⁾

Women were asked about their experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological violence, including incidents of intimate partner violence (domestic violence), and also asked about stalking, sexual harassment, and the role played by new technologies in women's experiences of abuse. The report found that one in 10 women had experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 15, and one in 20 had been raped. One in five women have experienced some form of stalking since the age of 15, with 5% having experienced it in the 12 months preceding the survey. However, it was reported that three out of every four stalking cases never come to the attention of the police. Most violence is carried out by a current or former partner, with 22% of women in relationships reporting partner abuse.⁽³⁾



Muslim countries fare no better

In Muslim countries, the numbers of women being abused is no better. "In India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, gender inequality is so marked," reports Rachel Jewkes, director of the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls global program. She states, "there are a myriad of behaviors, and the problem of entitlement is firmly articulated by society."⁽⁴⁾

One region where the #MeToo campaign has been somewhat quieter is the Arab world. Experts believe that the burden of harassment and abuse there is as rife as in any other region but that the voices heard are few and far between. Lina Abirafeh, director of the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World in Lebanon, states, "There are so many reasons behind this silence. I've heard trickles ... (but) people are scared." She highlighted the stigma and shame associated with speaking out about experiences with sexual harassment or assault in predominantly Muslim countries.⁽⁵⁾

In Egypt, where 90% of the population is Muslim, a staggering 98% of the Egyptian women polled in 2013 said they had been sexually harassed by Egyptian men.⁽⁵⁾ And almost two-thirds of Egyptian men polled actually admitted that they had harassed women. One of the most important aspects of this study was that it found that 72.5% of victims surveyed were wearing hijab when they were sexually harassed. It happens to all women, even ones that are in full hijab, under several layers of clothing.

Treatment of women historically and in the Bible

Around the world, therefore, such incidents have become part and parcel of women's daily lives. While Western society lauds the inculcation of women's rights with emphasis on tolerance and freedom, in reality, women have not been protected from such behavior. Similarly in Muslim countries, as data reveals, the equal treatment and protection of Muslim women, whether they cover themselves or not, fares no better.

Undoubtedly, throughout the history, women in all countries have been subjected to enslavement and servitude. While there have been a few women, who on account of their intelligence, social status, or birthright, have ruled over some men, this cannot be considered true freedom and has been more the exception. Such exceptional freedom should not be perceived as equality between the genders.

Religion has undeniably played a role in shaping the belief system of men believing themselves to be superior to women. The Bible begins in Genesis with the creation of Eve from the rib of Adam. Then throughout the Bible, references are made to women as secondary to men, offering contradictory instructions as to the role of women: "To the woman, he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain, you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' "(6) "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior."(7) The same teachings are true of other faiths that predated Christianity.

While religion may be to blame for the mistreatment of women today, Western society has, as of recently, admitted that even with the promulgation of equal protection laws, from the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) of 1923, to the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (protecting against racial and gender discrimination) served little to affect the ongoing mistreatment of women today.

The Teachings of Islam

Surprisingly, the only long-term solution is found in the teachings of Islam as practiced by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa). When Islam was first introduced to the world, in 610 A.D., it clarified that women were not created out of a body part of a man. Rather, the Holy Qur'an, which Muslims believe to be the word of God, testified to the fact that men and women were created from a single soul and are of the same kind and species: "He has created you from a single being; then of the same kind made its mate."(8)

This single verse removes any taint of inferiority leveled at womankind by men, as in other scriptures. Thus, Allah first established in the Holy Qur'an men and women as equal



beings, distinguished only based on their righteousness:

"Whoso acts righteously, whether male or female and is a believer, We will surely grant a pure life, and We will surely bestow on such their reward according to the best of their works."(9)

"But whoso does good works, whether male or female, and is a believer, such shall enter Heaven, and shall not be wronged even as much as the little hollow in the back of a date-stone."(10)

The Holy Qur'an also forbade men from forcing a woman to act against her will:

"O ye who believe! It is not lawful for you to inherit women against their will; nor should you detain them wrongfully that you may take away part of that which you have given them, except that they be guilty of a flagrant evil; and consort with them in kindness; and if you dislike them, it may be that you dislike a thing wherein Allah has placed much good."(11)

Therefore, throughout the Holy Qur'an, the emphasis was laid on the concept of "equal but different" roles of men and women. "And the male is not like the female"(12); "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women."(13)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) emphasized that in the sight of Allah, women could attain to the highest levels of righteousness and spirituality, same as men, that they were to be judged for their piety as were men. He stated, "Paradise lies at the feet of your mother."(14) and "The most perfect man in religion is one who excels in character. And the best amongst you is he who gives the best treatment to his womenfolk."(15)

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) also explained the metaphorical meaning of women being created from a rib: "Treat women well, for they have been created from a rib. The rib is most curved in its upper part so that if you try to straighten it out, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain intact. Therefore, follow my advice on giving fair treatment to women." (16) "A believing man does not despise a believing woman. If he finds something in her character he dislikes, he will be pleased by something else." (17) Even after he passed away, his teachings continued to be obeyed. His own wife, Hazrat Ayesha (ra) became a teacher of both men and women and is presently renowned for her recollection of his sayings (hadith).

Islam's solution: Changing the psychology of the individual and society

Islam's approach has always been proactive (not waiting for problems to occur and then trying to find solutions). It is also positive and systematic. There are more than 700 commandments to do positive acts in the Holy Qur'an. Furthermore, the Islamic approach addresses change in the entire society, not just in the individual.

In order for a society to be a pure society, both men and women should think, dress, and behave in ways that allow pure thoughts and actions to dominate the way of life and create a social climate conducive to the achievement of the real goal of life, the achievement of communion with our God, our Creator. Physical attraction between men and women is good and pure, but only within the context of the institution of marriage, which is regarded as a sacred bond.

Hijab/purdah was introduced in early Islam to guard the moral condition of the society. The Holy Qur'an has laid down that "hijab" is one of the methods that both men and women are to use to become a high moral society:

"Say to the believing men that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts. That is purer for them. Surely, Allah is well aware of what they do." (18)

And "Say to the believing women that they restrain their looks and guard their private parts, and that they display not their beauty or their embellishment except that which is apparent thereof, and that they draw their head-coverings over their bosoms." (19)

The verse goes on to list close relatives from whom observing hijab/purdah is not necessary. From these verses, it is made clear that both men and women are to conduct themselves with modesty and propriety at all times and especially when in each other's presence. This teaching is based on the fact that Islam recognizes that "prevention is the better part of a cure."

Islam did not simply address the outward show of a physical

covering but addressed the heart itself. The Holy Qur'an warns, "whether you disclose what is in your minds or keep it hidden, Allah will call you to account for it." (20) Therefore, the true and full observance of hijab/purdah is achieved when "veiling" extends to a man or woman's mind and heart. This means that one should veil or shield his/her mind and heart from impure and immoral thoughts when in contact with the opposite sex. One's thoughts, words, and actions should reflect a love and respect towards fellow beings. This behavior leads to one's own moral betterment, and also creates an atmosphere where men and women, instead of resenting and degrading each other, treat each other with respect and understanding.

What society today can learn from true Islamic teachings

If these were the teachings of Islam, what changed in the Muslim world? While on the outside, hijab is still being observed today, why is the respect and dignity of Muslim women even worse than women in Western society?

The reason is that while there is much emphasis among Muslim clergy on hijab, there is little emphasis placed on "haya" by both sexes. Sermon-givers often pick and choose verses in the Qur'an and misinterpret them so as to dominate and subjugate women. Islam no longer places stress on "Akhlāq" (manners) combined with "Adab" (etiquette, respect) about ways to treat women and the rights of women.

Therefore, despite the apparent rise in religiosity in Muslim countries, the attitudes toward women have not changed but have gotten worse. There is also deep-rooted hostility towards women based on a misunderstanding of Ahadith, as well as resentment towards women who want to step out of the four corners of their homes.



In addition, there is an increased lack of "Taqwa" (Righteousness) which nurtures a mindset of accountability to Allah and understands that every action has reward or punishment in the Hereafter. In practicing taqwa, a Muslim man must adhere to Islam's limits and rules, maintaining upright, moral behavior regardless of whether he is in his home or at the workplace. This aids the creation of a safe society. When men have disregard for accountability to God, and the status of women as spiritually equal to men, then a downward spiral of harassment and violence, whether domestic or societal, is inevitable.

In conclusion, if the West and the modern Muslim world wishes to exhibit a change in the treatment of women, whether in their homes or at the workplace, the focus needs to shift from labeling only individual perpetrators as depraved men or criminals to a wider realization that society as a whole needs to adopt principles of piety and respect for each other. When individuals focus on God first and begin to realize that fair treatment of the opposite gender is a means of winning the pleasure of Allah, only then will we see a change.

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Why We Need Faith During Difficult Times

Bushra Bajwa

"I've been very lucky, and therefore I owe it to try and reduce the inequity in the world." (1) Says Bill Gates, the richest person in the world for 18 out of the past 25 years. Gates adds, "The moral systems of religion, I think, are super important." Bill Gates and his wife Melinda are known for their philanthropy and the noble efforts of their charitable organization. While some people believe that religion has no importance or relevance in modern-day society, religious people and organizations contribute immensely to our world. Religions teach their followers to have good morals and care towards others. What's more, having faith also helps people during their difficult times. It helps them to find comfort and have peace within themselves when they are faced with tough times. These are the fundamental reasons why we need faith during tough times.

At times it seems that religions only cause problems in the world. This view of religion is partly due to the way media portrays religions. It is also true that many awful acts of terror are carried out in the name of religion. However, an entire religion cannot be blamed for the actions of a few. No religion supports terror, fighting or war. The actions of the KKK do not represent Christianity. Nor do the Taliban, Boko Haram, or Al-Qaeda, represent the true teachings of Islam. Ziauddin Yousafzai, the father of Malala, the schoolgirl who was shot in the head by Taliban for speaking up for the rights of women to get an education, says, "They are not about faith, they are about power. They are enemies of Islam." (2) In many parts of the world, religion is taken by political leaders and manipulated to help them gain strength and power, leaving religion with a bad name.

Faith Teaches us to Adopt High Moral Standards

It can be argued that those who believe in God may have a greater sense of morality and will strive only to carry out those actions, which will please their Creator. In today's society, some people make false accusations against others to claim money through insurance companies, some drink and drive putting other people's lives at risk and others spend lavishly on themselves while many live in poverty. In the Quran, it says that Allah is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. A true Muslim will ponder over this and think twice before carrying out any act, which would incur the displeasure of Allah such as lying, backbiting, or infidelity.

High moral standards in leaders, in particular, is essential to contribute to peaceful and equitable societies. Unfortunately, corrupt leadership is the downfall of many societies. However,



there are many examples of great leaders who taught good values to their followers. Hazrat Umar (ra), the third successor of Prophet Muhammad (sa) one night, while out on a round of quiet inspection, heard the crying of a baby. He entered the tent and asked the mother: "Why do you not suckle the child?" The woman did not recognize the Khalifa and answered, "Umar has decreed that no ration be granted in the case of infants until they were weaned. We are poor, and I have weaned the child early so that we should get a measure of ration that includes the child." Hazrat Umar (ra) was saddened when he heard this. He went to the public treasury and put a sack of flour on his back. When an attendant offered to carry it for him, he replied, "No, I failed to discharge my responsibility. I must make amends for it myself." He then carried the flour to the woman and ordered the next day that a ration be granted for a child from the day it was born. (3) This is the high standard of responsibility and accountability that true religious leaders display.

Faith Teaches us to Care About Our Fellow Beings

Care and concern for others is a fundamental concept in all religions, equal or second to the love of God. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (4) Very similar to this is the Islamic teaching of Haquq-ul Allah and Haquq-ul Ibaad, that is, to pay the rights due to God and also the rights due to one's fellow beings.

The Holy Prophet Muhammad (sa) greatly emphasized good relations with all. He emphasized the importance of looking after parents in their old age and in particular honoring one's

mother.(5) He taught his followers to take care of their neighbors, saying that when they make broth, add some water to it, and give it to their neighbors.(6) His consideration for others was set to such a high degree, that when he walked passed the house of a lady who used to throw trash on him when he passed by and did not do so on a particular day, he enquired to see if the lady was okay.

People of the Jewish faith follow the concept of Tikkun Olam.(7) Hebrew for “world repair.”Tikkun Olam is any activity that improves the world. It is the Jewish equivalent of acts of kindness. Tikkun Olam is not only about social action and the pursuit of social justice. It is also about the way one eats, what they eat, the way they treat others, the commitments one makes to family and friend. All these are ways that Tikkun Olam brings the world closer to its ultimate purpose.

There are many commonalities between religions to either command or encourage the act of giving. Religions teach their followers to give up their love for money, property, and other material things, to give generously, and to realize that nothing is theirs. It is a call to overcome one’s selfish nature and to realize one’s deep interconnectedness with each other and all of creation. As a whole, faith-based organizations and individuals have a significant impact on global humanitarian efforts. According to one study, religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs) gave 90% of the assistance provided after World War II.(8) NGOs related to the World Council of Churches and those of the group of Caritas Internationalis spend over a billion dollars a year in aid and development. Faith-based charities can attract vast sums of money for relief efforts and are instrumental in aid work throughout the world.

Faith Gives us Comfort During Difficult Times

Faith is not only about creating peace in the world. Faith can also help one to have peace within oneself. At some point in life, everyone faces some form of adversity, the loss of a loved one, an illness, financial issues, marriage problems, or other difficulties. During these times, one realizes that one’s wealth, human connections, and other advantages are nothing compared to the power of God. He is the Provider and Lord of all the worlds. Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, the fourth successor to Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah and Mahdi (as), comments, “Suffering, has been a great teacher, cultivating and culturing our conduct. It develops and refines sensibilities, teaches humility and in more than one way, prepares humans to be able to turn to God.”(9) The awareness that God is our friend is a source of comfort for people of faith during difficult times. Moreover, the knowledge that God is Merciful, Who gives them hope in tough times. “The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and

saves those who are crushed in spirit.”(10)

Studies reveal that the comfort that one gets from their relationship with God can also benefit one’s psychological well-being, which can translate into physical well-being. Researchers from Moffitt Cancer Center found a link between patients with higher levels of spiritual well-being and better physical health.(11) Having faith enables one to believe in the power of prayer, to ponder on the question ‘why are we here?’ And to help form one’s thoughts about life beyond the grave. It enables one to move from material desires to understand the object of life. With this understanding, one may live a more purposeful and content life.

Prophets, though they were God’s chosen people, also endured extreme hardships in their lives. Abraham (as) was



thrown into a fire by his Chiefs. Jesus (as) was nailed to the cross. Adam (as) had to migrate from his home country. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, the Promised Messiah (as) writes, "The calamities and hardships that the Holy Prophet (sa) had to endure during the thirteen years of his Meccan life cannot be imagined. Our heart trembles when we think of them. They demonstrate his high resolve, generous heartedness, perseverance, and steadfastness. What a mountain of steadfastness he was that no difficulty could shake him in the least." (12) God Almighty tested his prophets with misfortunes so that their endurance, steadfastness, and faithfulness to God was demonstrated to their followers. These are the examples set for people of faith that they too may adopt such qualities during times of hardship.

Conclusion

It can be argued that you do not need to belong to a particular religion or have faith at all, to be able to do good in the world, but it is without a doubt that people of faith have a lot to offer the world with their integrity, concern for fellow beings, and being at peace with themselves. Unfortunately, religion is given a bad name in this day and age because of the actions of a few. To combat this issue, we need to better educate one another on the true teachings of each religion. Furthermore, interfaith dialogs can help bring together people of different faiths to find common ground and to work collaboratively to do good. Nwuneli comments that we need to recognize, "...the power and potential of faith-based organizations, leveraging their assets, their scale, the public trust and credibility, their lower operating costs, their access to the grassroots and their presence abroad." (13) Moreover, when the effort is on doing good together, rather than against each other, there is higher potential to make better times for all.

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Transgression, Faith, and Modern Times

Arifa Haleem

Transgression, faith and modern times are three different words and they seem to be quite different in meaning but deep down they are closely interlinked in some way or the other.

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, transgression means "violation of a law, command or duty". Faith means "strong belief or trust in someone or something." It may be in one's own self, any deity, sun, moon, morality, or only in One Divine Being. Modern times mean "involving recent techniques, methods or ideas that is, the time of new ideas that bring changes in culture and society (1).

Modern age is an era of materialism, science, proof, evidence and advanced technology. Faith on the one hand with all its devotion tries to block transgression and its harmful effects and on the other hand it paves the way for seeking knowledge, to explore and discover the heights and depths of this universe and reminds man to be the harbinger of goodness not evil because this is what God wants. So to breach the command or moral code is strictly forbidden by the Divine Being. To go beyond the prescribed bounds of prudence is a great sin. It applies to all the aspects of life whether they are domestic, social, political, national or international. Any person who goes beyond the commands or rules which he believes will have negative effects on his personality and will have harmful impact of disunity and conflict on that society to which he belongs but if there is a matter of man's life and death even in this situation the Holy Qur'an says, "Fight in the way of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress, Indeed Allah does not like transgressors" (2).

In Surah Al Nahl (chapter 16) verse 91 the Holy Qur'an reminds man by saying,

"Verily, Allah enjoins justice and doing the good to others and giving like kindred and forbids indecency and manifest evil, and wrongful transgression. He admonished you that you may take heed" (3). About transgression the New Testament says, "Who-soever committeth sin transgresseth also the law, for sin is transgression of the law" (4). At another place the Holy Bible says, "Then I will visit their transgression with rod and their iniquity with stripes" (5). The fact is that the Ultimate Creator blessed man with knowledge and rationality and free will to differentiate between good and evil for leading a dignified harmonious life in this universe but made it incumbent to abide

by His commands and not to cross their limits otherwise the wild animals of evil will enter in his protected territory and cause great harm. The main reason for man's breaking the prescribed rules is his selfishness and attraction of gaining temporary material benefits and pleasures.

The solution of all the issues of life is very clearly stated in the Holy Qur'an. For instance, a husband and wife sometimes pass through very difficult and heart breaking situations. Even then God Almighty warns them not to transgress in any matter and decisions should be made according to His commands. It is stated in the Holy Qur'an, "...These are the limits prescribed by Allah so transgress them not and whoso transgresses the limits prescribed by Allah it is they that are the wrongdoers" (6). God and His commandments are not only for believers but they are an open invitation for the whole world to think about and decide rationally which universal school of thought satisfies them the most. In our daily life we see cars running and rushing on the roads. Before being at the steering wheel the driver must know the traffic rules. He has to take test theoretically as well as practically and only then he is eligible for obtaining a driver's license. On the road he has to be very careful about speed, traffic signs, traffic signals, right of way and many other rules. If a driver by ignoring the red light rushes and crosses the road or intersection and at the same time another driver from the other side also does the same thing the result will be a fatal crash. If anyone of them survives then judgment of the court must be waiting for the perpetrator of the accident.



Rules are rules whether they are man-made or by the Creator and must be followed. Unshaken trust in the Unseen Being builds a strong bond between man and his Creator and this strong trust and firm faith lead him towards obedience, devotion, steadfastness and sacrifice for achieving higher spirituality. The glorious divine guiding light blesses man with spiritual strength to stay away from malicious and nefarious designs of transgression. The fact is that trust in one's own religion creates confidence and trustworthiness and makes him honorable, ethical and conscientious and it also enkindles the light of guidance and hope in the human heart and strengthens his faculties.

It is a fact that at the time of tests and trials when man loses all hope he staggers and becomes humble due to his own misdeeds and infringement and as a result of his remorse he repents and struggles for his survival like a straw in the ocean and starts believing and waiting for some Unseen Force to appear from nowhere and save him. So his firm faith in the Unseen Force becomes a guiding light, savior and source of strength not only for that person who is saved but his personal miraculous experience leaves deep imprints on the minds of other community members too. In this regard the following saying of the Holy Prophet (sa) describes three important points of faith. Hazrat Anas ibn Malik (ra) reported the Holy Prophet (saw) said,

"None will taste the sweetness of faith until he loves a person only for the sake of Allah, until he would rather be thrown in the fire than return to unbelief, and until Allah and his messenger are more beloved to him than anything" (Sahih al Bukhari 5694 , Sahih Muslim 43). Who can forget the example of Hazrat Bilal (ra) the Companion and the first Muezzin (caller to the Islamic Prayer) who kept hold of his unshaken faith tightly and in spite of unbearable hardships and tortures he never staggered in any way.

Though time changes along the human mind the ways of God remain the same and faith in the Unseen Being goes on in playing its part. Time is constantly in flow and this flow brings with it different changes too and now it has brought the era of material possession, fun, luxury, happiness, progress and advanced technology. Even in this era of materialism faith is still alive in many hearts. People are still affiliated with their places of worship though the number of adherents to organized religion is decreasing as skepticism is influencing the belief system.

Scientific theories and discoveries have played a big part in changing our outlook of life. It's an era of exploring space, planets, black holes, different dimensions and many more things. Science and technology have opened many unknown venues which in the past were nothing but mysteries. Research is being conducted in medical and other fields for the benefit of humanity. People are becoming more enlightened. Though the use of

cell phone has created individualism and isolation they it is a need of the time. Most of the business and other worldly matters are settled online or on cell phones. Due to the Hi-Tech world we are living in that within seconds one can get news from any corner of the world. A big race is going on among different Super Powers to become a champion of exploration and conquest of the universe. Research is underway to find the possibilities to settle down on Mars or on any other suitable planet. The positive outcome of science and technology is that they have contributed significantly to the benefit of humanity. On the negative side in this modern material era irrational free choices and unchecked freedom have given birth to many issues such as, sexual scandals and infidelity. Number of babies born out of wedlock is increasing day by day.

Instead of being united, religious groups are causing rift, disunity and bloodshed. Some people consider religion as a tool for money making and gaining political purpose. A question asked by many is that if religion teaches love, compassion, and tolerance, then why is there so much violence in the name of religion? More and more people are giving up on the institution of marriage which in turn is causing various problems in the society. Many people, particularly the youth, are confused and full of questions about religions where there is contradiction between theory and practice. They are becoming skeptical even about the existence of God and life after death and are drifting away from religion. The fact is that God is the Absolute Creator of the universe, and has got unlimited and infinite ideas of creation so the process of His creativity is continuously and endlessly going on. From time to time He puts new creative ideas in man's mind. Faith tells that man's progress and technological advancements are due to God's will. So in order to eradicate confusion and skepticism in religion there is a solution that lies in scientific explanations by highly knowledgeable teachers who can answer the asked questions in light of the Holy Qur'an, the final and perfect divine revelation. In this regard tolerance, steadfastness, continuous good and polite behaviors are the tools for effective communication. If these tools are available then faith with all its strength can push away the sins of transgression and can lead to the right path for driving the modern time vehicle of life because on both the sides of the right path there is darkness and deep pitfalls.

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Women's Space

Hijab: A Challenge for Muslim Women in the West

Shahina Bashir

There is no question that the tragic event of September 11, 2001 was a turning point for American Muslims. Of some 3000 lives which were lost on that fateful day, 60 were Muslims. Yes, the perpetrators of this horrific crime called themselves Muslims and Al-Qaeda took responsibility for it, but this act had nothing to do with Islam, or with the more than one billion people around the globe who adhere to Islam, the second largest religion in the world.

The immediate consequence of this terrorist attack on America's soil was an increasingly hostile attitude towards Islam and Muslims. Anti-Muslim hate crimes shot up from 28 in the year 2000 to 481 in 2001 (1). According to the Pew Research Study, 93 Muslims experienced aggravated or simple assault in 2001. Although this number went down and remained stable until 2014, the data shows that there was a spike in the number of assaults between 2015 and 2016 (2). This anti-Muslim/anti-Islam sentiment is not only felt in the USA, but it has taken root in many parts of the world, particularly in Europe, Australia, and Canada. The easy targets in many cases are Muslim women who wear the hijab or the headscarf as this is a recognizable mark of their Muslim faith. Several European countries have banned Muslim women from donning the full face veil, burqa, or the hijab (3). Unfortunately the ban had nothing to do with assimilation into the culture or society but everything to do with unwarranted fear of terrorist attacks by extremist Muslims. Although such bans clearly go against the concept of religious freedom, the power of politics won and the constitution was thrown away.

American Muslim women have been spared this infringement on their religious freedom and can move around in society with the Islamic veil (full or partial). But at the same time Muslim women who do wear the headscarf have been subjected to physical assaults. At the end of March this year, communities in the United Kingdom were invited to an event

titled "Punish a Muslim Day" to be observed on April 3. The letter that was sent out stated that points will be awarded to those who carry out the list of acts against Muslims. Pulling a woman's hijab would be worth 25 points while 500 points would be awarded for "butchering a Muslim using a gun, knife, vehicle or otherwise". On April 3, a young hijab-wearing Muslim woman was attacked at a hospital in Michigan (4). On the same day a female Muslim student was assaulted on a Kansas City college campus (5). On April 5, a hijab-wearing Muslim woman was attacked on her way back from work in Houston. She was stabbed in her arm as racial slurs were hurled at her (6). Were these just random attacks or did they have something to do with the "Punish a Muslim Day" threat?

The attacks in New York on September 11, 2001 instilled a fear of backlash among Muslims. That day many Muslim women were afraid to be seen out on the streets with their hijab lest they be subject to harassment or attacked because of their faith. Parents who were concerned about their daughters' safety instructed them to stop wearing the hijab. But as weeks and months went by and the dust settled, Muslim women put their fear aside and returned to the hijab. They did this for the love of their Creator and to obey the commandment laid out in the Holy Qur'an which instructs Muslim women to cover their heads and wear a loose outer garment when they go outside of the confines of their homes.

The challenge that Muslim women face in the West regarding the donning of the hijab is not solely a result of Islamophobia. A significant number of Muslim women and men either do not comprehend fully the importance of the headscarf, or they reject the notion that the Qur'an explicitly commands Muslim women to cover. Others say that the injunction was only applicable at the time of the revelation of the verses during 7th century Arabia but does not apply to our modern world. The Qur'an says,

"And say to the believing women that they restrain their eyes and guard their private parts, and that they disclose not their natural and artificial beauty except that which is apparent thereof, and that they draw their head-coverings over their bosoms." (7)

The Qur'an further states,

"O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters and the women of the believers that they should draw close to them portions of their loose outer coverings" (8)

The relevant verses state clearly that God has commanded Muslim women to dress in a way which conceals both natural and artificial beauty. The guidance in the Qur'an is universal and valid for all times. To say that modesty as prescribed in the Holy Book is not needed today is a flawed argument.

Although wearing the hijab may be a challenge in Western society, there are many Muslim women who are leading by example and standing as role models. In 2013 Nazma Khan, an immigrant from Bangladesh, founded the annual event called "World Hijab Day" (9). Khan came to the USA at the age of 11. As a young 'hijabi' (hijab-wearing) girl, she faced bullying while a middle school student. "World Hijab Day" is an annual event held on February 1st and celebrated across the globe. The purpose is to raise awareness and dispel the misconception that hijab is a symbol of oppression. In the summer Olympics of 2016, Ibtihaj Mohammad became the first Muslim woman to participate in the games wearing her hijab. Tawakkol Karman and Malala Yousafzai are two Muslim women who individually have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. They are not seen in public without a head-covering.



Despite the backlash and negativity against Muslim women in the US, the Constitution protects the rights of these individuals. In May of 2015, the Supreme Court ruled against the clothing store 'Abercrombie and Fitch' when its hiring practice was found to be discriminatory through failure to accommodate a Muslim woman who wore the hijab (10).

These examples demonstrate that by educating oneself and others, the challenge of observing the hijab by Muslim women can be overcome. Above all it is imperative that one should remain steadfast and seek God's help and guidance to be a righteous Muslim and obey His commandments, even in the face of difficulties, fear, and weakness.

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NEWS, VIEWS, & REVIEWS



Resurrection did not happen, say quarter of Christians

A quarter of people who describe themselves as Christians in Great Britain do not believe in the resurrection of Jesus, a survey commissioned by the BBC suggests.

However, almost one in 10 people of no religion say they do believe the Easter story, but it has "some content that should not be taken literally".

A fifth of non-religious people believe in life after death, the poll suggests.

The Church of England said it showed many people held religious beliefs.

ComRes surveyed 2,010 British adults by telephone, between 2 and 12 February 2017. The research was commissioned by BBC local radio for Palm Sunday.

The survey suggested:

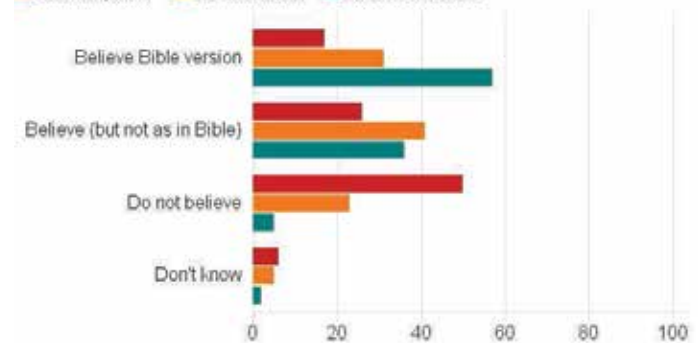
- 17% of all people believe the Bible version word-for-word
- 31% of Christians believe word-for-word the Bible version, rising to 57% among "active" Christians (those who go to a religious service at least once a month)
- Exactly half of all people surveyed did not believe in the resurrection at all

- 46% of people say they believe in some form of life after death and 46% do not
- 20% of non-religious people say they believe in some form of life after death
- 9% of non-religious people believe in the Resurrection, 1% of whom say they believe it literally

Belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ

% of people asked about the Bible story of Christ rising from the dead

■ General public ■ All Christians ■ Active Christians



Source: ComRes survey of 2,010 British adults for BBC local radio

BBC

The New York Times

No Handshake, No Citizenship, French Court Tells Algerian Woman

By Aurelien Breeden, April 21, 2018

PARIS — An Algerian woman's refusal to shake hands with male officials at a French naturalization ceremony is sufficient grounds for denying her citizenship, France's top administrative court has ruled.

In its decision — issued on April 11 but reported only this week — the court, known as the Council of State, said that

the woman's refusal "in a place and at a moment that are symbolic, reveals a lack of assimilation."

The woman, who has not been identified, married a French citizen in Algeria in 2010 and filed for French citizenship five years later. At her naturalization ceremony in 2016 in Grenoble, in southeastern France, the woman refused to shake the hands of a local state official and of a local elected official, both male, citing her religious convictions.

The ruling did not specify the woman's religion, and it did not identify her as Muslim. Some practicing Muslims believe Islam does not permit physical contact with a person of the opposite sex, with the exception of immediate family members.

After the woman refused to shake hands with the officials, she was denied citizenship.

The woman appealed, but the court ruled this past week that the decree was legal. The ruling was based on a law that gives the government two years after a foreign spouse files for naturalization to oppose the request, on grounds of "lack of assimilation, other than linguistic." The court also ruled that the decision was not detrimental to her freedom of religion.

The court's ruling has not garnered widespread attention within the country, but many recent debates in France on the place of Muslims in French society have focused on issues of gender relations and attitudes toward women. Similar debates have played out elsewhere in Europe. In 2016, local authorities in Switzerland said two Muslim boys, both immigrants from Syria, could not refuse to shake their female teacher's hand on religious grounds.

In the summer of 2016, France was roiled by debates over the burkini — full-body swimsuits that comply with Islamic modesty standards — after several Mediterranean coastal towns banned them on their beaches.

The veil worn by some Muslim women also has become a flash point in France, which passed a law in 2010 banning face-covering garments like the burqa or niqab in public, although the law did not explicitly mention Islam.

Wearing a veil that doesn't cover the face is not banned in public, except in the case of students in public schools and civil servants, who are not allowed to wear visibly religious symbols or clothing on the job.

President Emmanuel Macron, speaking on French television last week, said "the issue of the veil is very important today"



but said he was not in favor of any new laws restricting those who choose to wear the garment.

"Why does this veil make us feel insecure?" Mr. Macron asked. "Because it is not in keeping with the civility in our country, that is to say with the relations between men and women in our country."

"We are attached to this equality between man and woman, and so we do not understand this difference, this distance, this separation," Mr. Macron said of the veil.

But he said he respected a woman's choice to wear it.

"I am not personally happy that it is that way, but I do not want to make a law that bans it in the street, because it would be counterproductive," Mr. Macron said.



INDEPENDENT

I'm a middle-aged, white Scottish man who converted to Islam without ever meeting a Muslim. This is how

It's important to remember the distinction between written Islamic teachings and culture in the real world. After 18 months, I went to my first mosque and met other Muslims properly for the first time

ALAN ROONEY | Tuesday 9 February 2016 13:39 GMT | 2779 comments



It's important to remember the distinction between written Islamic teachings and culture in the real world. After 18 months, I went to my first mosque and met other Muslims properly for the first time

How does a middle-aged, white Scottish man living in the Scottish Highlands end up becoming a Muslim - especially when he hasn't properly met a Muslim in his life?

For me, it all started when I heard the call to prayer from a local mosque while on a beach holiday in Turkey. It woke something up inside me, and inspired me to begin a spiritual quest.

Back home in Inverness, I went to the local bookshop, bought a Qur'an and started to read. While reading, I always asked God to guide me on the journey I had set out on.

A lot of praying. A lot of time on my knees.

The Qur'an really shook me. It's quite a scary book to read because it tells you so much about yourself. Some things that I found out about myself I didn't like. So I decided to make some changes.

I knew that I could stop reading the Qur'an and halt the process at any time, but I also knew that would mean giving up something really important.

And I knew what the end result of this process would be: I would be a Muslim.

So I kept on reading. I read it three times, looking for the catch. But there was no catch; I was quite comfortable with everything.

The difficult part in all of this was wondering who I would become. Would I become strange, dress differently, speak differently in the eyes of others?

What would my family, friends and workmates think of me? Most importantly, what would I think about myself? Would I like who I became?

I would spend time conducting searches online, looking for the stories of people who had gone through this experience themselves. Nothing ever seemed to quite fit the bill - each person's journey, of course, is unique. It is good to know, however, that others have gone down this same path as you. Put simply, I turned to these resources when I became afraid I'd be seen as an oddball.

Online resources are great to find out how to pray in Arabic, to listen to the Qur'an read out loud or perhaps to listen to some

Islamic music. For me, music was a great way of picking up some of the phrases I wanted to start to use.

Key in all of this, though, is that I questioned absolutely everything - as is absolutely necessary in a religious conversion. You question yourself. You question what you hear, and what you read.

If something doesn't feel right to you, then it's a clear indication that it's not for you. You have to listen carefully to your intuition and your heart.

Working through this process took me about 18 months. Some people take less time, some people more. And I was doing all this on my own, with no-one to help. I still hadn't met any Muslims.

After those 18 months, however, I considered myself a Muslim. I was praying five times a day, fasting for Ramadan, and eating and drinking only what was considered acceptable according to the teachings of the Qu'ran.

It was only then I found out that there was actually a small mosque in my town. I popped along, knocked on the door and introduced myself.

They were surprised to see me and didn't know quite what to do with me at first, except to give me the mosque door combination and to welcome me to their community. I was accepted from the very beginning, however, and am now a constant within the community.

I still had things to learn, of course.

What is Islam - and how do you divorce that religion from somebody's culture? It's important to point out that it's Islam you have to accept, rather than any cultural specificities from out in the world. You always retain the freedom to define your own identity, so long as you stay true to the written tenets of the Qu'ran.

So I am now a white, middle-aged Scottish Muslim. And happy with it.

poetry CORNER



Prayers and Propagation of Truth

By Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian
The Promised Messiah and Mahdi (as)

In the blink of an eye, this earth will turn upside down
Streams of blood will flow like water in tributaries and rivers

Those who were dressed in spotless white garments at night
Will be like the dried red leaves of a sycamore tree by morning

Humans and birds will lose all their sanity and senses
Pigeons and nightingales will forget their songs

Translation by Wajeeh Bajwa

Selected couplets from an Urdu poem by Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as),
"Manajat aur Tabligh Haq" from Duree-e-Sameen, Nazarat Nashro Ishaat,
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FROM THE ARCHIVES

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Art and Music in Islam

(Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, Khalifatul Massih IV)

(Verbal answer given by Hazrat Khalifatul Massih IV during a question/answer session at the Fazl mosque, London)

Question: Art and music are very popular these days. There are art schools everywhere which teach different kinds of arts. Libraries and art galleries are full of good pictures and paintings. Some people even invest their best in paintings by famous artists. Similar things could be said in respect to music, as we find almost everywhere records and cassettes for listening. Could Huzoor kindly explain the teachings of Islam regarding art and music?

Answer: This question is in fact a question which applies to different situations and the relative answer would differ from situation to situation. The Holy Quran speaks in principle about *Laghv*. The believers, Ebadul-Rahman are mentioned, Anilaghvi Mo'rizoon, they keep away from useless, valueless, nonsense things. Now it all depends. It varies from person to person. What is nonsense to one may not be nonsense to another. Also, the acquired tastes differ and the spiritual levels differ. So I am not in favor of declaring something totally wrong for everybody because there are stages of prohibition in Islam, and in some places Islam also leaves a measure of decision to the believers. And there, a sort of freedom of thought and action is given for which no hard and fast rule should be made or declared. Because then life would become very difficult for the whole society. Somehow some people tend to ask questions on such aspects and want such answers as would be very difficult to follow if given according to their own desire.

Again, the Holy Quran tells us in principle not to ask about matters which if answered would make things difficult for you. Don't ask about things which if answered may be heavy on you, may not be liked by you. So there are some regions unattended which are kept unattended by Islam consciously.

The philosophy I have already explained. Various people are found at various levels of development and attitudes and tastes. So *Laghv* could be interpreted differently according to different persons.

For instance, take one who is accepting Islam from a Western society. If you immediately declare a fatwa against his interest

in art, not only will he not understand, he will be more inclined to lose faith in Islam because it would appear to be so unnatural. So where Islam has not categorically prohibited, it diverts attention to more serious pursuits in life. And as I understand this word, this is the best definition.

And if the pursuits of life are of a higher order and a person who is pursuing a way of life is more serious minded, his *Laghv* would be different from just, say, a child's *Laghv*. A child can play hop scotch for instance. But hop scotch could be *Laghv* for an elder gentleman, for his age and his respectability and everything, and won't be *Laghv* for this child who has given us the name of this game. It would be, in fact, a very good thing for the child to do.

People are at different levels of spirituality too. Those who have acquired a taste for the recitation of the Holy Quran, or the reading of serious books on religion, if you give them a novel they won't be interested. It would be just *Laghv* for them. And there are certain people who apply their minds with difficulty to such serious pursuits. So if their attention is diverted too much to novel reading, for instance, at the cost of serious pursuits and they don't try to divert their attention from vain to serious, from useless to useful, then this *Laghv* would become prohibited for them. It will interfere with their progress in life and to the extent it should be forbidden for them.

So according to this definition, if the *Laghv* begins to interfere with the serious pursuits of life and creates damage for one in some degree, in certain spheres of activity, to the extent it becomes *Laghv* and it should be avoided.

And *Laghv* has a very wide field of definition. In fact, it can become a very grave sin, one of the serious offenses in Islam. For instance, suppose you are watching television, some light show or a fiction or something, and the time for prayers comes. Now that is *Laghv*, of course, it is not forbidden directly so much that it becomes a crime in the eyes of Allah. But the call for prayer is made and you can reach the mosque. But you are so

deeply involved in that play which is being televised that you forget about the prayer and continue pursuing the game or play or whatever it is. That *Laghv* becomes a sin then. It adopts a quality of idolatry, setting up partners with Allah, because a vain pursuit or interest has stood in the way of a very serious and important pursuit in life for which man is created.

So *Laghv* is a very difficult word to define. Although in essence I have defined it, it acquires different importances in different situations. *Laghv* can become a grave sin, and *Laghv* can be just ordinary. Even some people who are grown up and have a very strong acquired taste for spirituality, and who are very pious, indulge in some sort of *Laghv*. And those *Laghv* in which they indulge, apparently or superficially they are *Laghv*. But because they are serving some type of purpose, they can't be called that type of *Laghv* which is to be avoided. So *Laghv* in ordinary situations can lose its quality of being *Laghv* in another situation.

For instance, when you are on a picnic, your mood is completely different. You are playing with your children and you are doing things which in ordinary life you would not think of doing. That is no longer *Laghv* as described by the Holy Quran. That is not the *Laghv* which is described because that has become something that serves a purpose and it relaxes you for a while. Not at the cost of other innocent hobby or play. You can even play cards there without gambling. You can play ludo or anything, or while away your time in some way that relaxes you. The purpose is relaxation. And for that, some means are adopted. Those means in ordinary life may be declared as *Laghv*, meaningless, or diverting your attention from serious pursuits. But in those situations, they serve a purpose and they don't become *Laghv* anymore. So it is a very wide subject.

With this background, I now come to your question about music. Music as such is not forbidden in the Holy Quran. In some instances we read about our Holy Prophet, peace and blessing of Allah be on him, permitting the use of *Daf* which was a sort of a musical instrument played in Arabia in those days. Yet he is also known to have turned away from certain other musical instruments when he heard the voice, he didn't like. So the correct attitude lies somewhere in between. You understand the philosophy in this and then you can truly understand why he did this and why he did not do that. The fact is that such music as diverts your attention from other important things in life, love of Allah, love of the prayer, and the things for which man is made, that type of music should be avoided very strongly. And if it becomes an obsession with you, then it may become a sin. But to casually listen to music as it is played in every corner of the world nowadays, in fact even if you try hard you can't avoid. For that reason I should not declare it for never listening, because that would be coming on too strong. And the Holy Quran has not said it in so many words.

The inference that *Daf*, exactly as it is, is permitted, and other music as it is, is forbidden, that inference I can't agree with. Because it was a style of music found in Arabia. The style of music has changed a lot from that time. And while *Daf* was played, it was played for a purpose. At that time it was serving a purpose. So that definition which I have offered you, fits in very well.

For instance we hear of *Daf* being played when the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, was entering Medina, and some ladies and young girls were singing a song in his praise and were also striking on the *Daf*. Now that is a special type of musical instrument. On one side it is covered, on the other side it is not covered. Because of this shape of the *Daf*, there are many ulema who have inferred that only that type of musical instrument is permitted and nothing else. That is stupid because the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, came to give us guidelines and principles and set examples for all times to come. Not for one particular time.

So if you particularize everything which he did instead of drawing general principles which would be applicable for all times to come, then you would remain restricted to a certain age in history and will not be able to proceed a step beyond that. He never rode cars. He never used those modern amenities which are provided to you. So why should you not infer in every respect that only the type of bread which the Holy Prophet Muhammad ate and bread made of that particular grain which he used, that is permitted and this is not permitted. That type of dress is permitted and this is not permitted. If you go on making your inferences in this fashion, then the whole life you are leading would become forbidden. Because very little of it is exactly on the pattern of our Hazrat, peace and blessings of God be on him, as he lived in those days. He didn't use these electrical lights and, in fact, the camera was not invented at that time. So he never had a picture of himself taken. All this picture taking and posing for pictures becomes forbidden by those standards.

So open up your minds. Try to understand the philosophy of Islam. According to the Holy Quran, that which is forbidden is clearly laid down. That which is promoted is very clearly laid down. In between there are no man's lands on which some light is thrown by way of principles and the borders go on shifting from here to there like, quick sand. Those no man's lands which I am referring to in do's and do not's, differ from situation to situation which squeeze in one direction and swell in another at another time. This music and painting lies in this region under *Laghv*. If this becomes a pursuit of life which interfere with higher values for which you are created, then to that extent it becomes forbidden. If it does not interfere with the seriousness in your life and it only helps a little bit to energize your nerves

or relax your nerves for a while, I don't think this could be forbidden, so categorically at least.

There are certain pursuits that become an obsession. For instance, I have known people, in Pakistan as well, who become fond of what we call Hindi gana. They sing songs and this becomes their obsession with the result that they neither pay attention to their studies nor to their religious obligations. They don't read the Promised Messiah's (peace be on him) books. They have no time for Ahadith, the tradition of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, or even for the Holy Quran. And that becomes a habit for them. A nonsensical song which, as far as the value of the song goes, is just a third rate thing. But because it is sung with music, that interests them so much and so deeply that their whole life is thrilled when they begin to listen to such music and they can't listen to anything else. That is a sort of addiction. In this regard when this happens, then it becomes haram because it is interfering with the obligatory spheres of Islam. And it stands in the way of your making spiritual progress.

But if somebody is paying attention to his spiritual progress and for instance he turns on a radio and a song is being played he likes and he listens to it for a while, while he has time and he is not wasting any time at all, to declare suddenly that he should stop it immediately or he becomes a kafir or something, is stupid. That is not Islam's concept of Halal or Haraam.

Similarly some people could say that painting is totally forbidden because our master, Muhammad, peace and blessings of God be on him, did not permit pictures, according to them, either to be kept in the house or to be drawn. But they don't understand the fact that those pictures which the Holy Prophet forbade were invariably the pictures of idols. That was a time when (picture taking by camera was out of the question

because they were not invented) drawing pictures or painting was entirely devoted to religious purposes for drawing pictures of imaginary gods. In the days of the Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, we don't find any art in Arabia, not even remotely, in which people were being drawn or realities were being drawn. You will not find dimensions of any scenery being drawn by any artist of that time. You will not find the portrait being drawn by somebody, nor any particular situation of reality being drawn. All that was being drawn was not only fiction but the fiction was against the fundamental principles laid down by Islam. There were pictures of imaginary idols, partners of Allah. They were either drawn or chiseled out in the form of statues.

What our Holy Prophet, peace and blessings of God be on him, forbade were these things. Because we have no evidence that a real situation in life was ever being drawn in his presence which he forbade, my inference is that what he forbade was that purpose which you understand. To extend it further into a field which was never in his mind is incorrect. Nor could he have spoken against that because that (artistic realism) did not interfere with any religious purpose. Here we can understand the purpose easily. Idol making stands in hostility to the Islamic concept of Oneness of Allah. So whatever promotes idolatry should be forbidden. That is quite understandable. But where nature as such, and realities are being produced somewhere, how could they be forbidden? Neither is it forbidden nor could it be forbidden to my mind. So I don't think this should be declared haram either. But if it becomes an obsession with your girls or boys and it begins to interfere with the serious pursuits of life, then I think it should be stopped to that extent. Then they become Laghv. And that Laghv is forbidden in the Holy Quran.



Questions & Answers

What is the nature of human conscience?

Human consciences is also a source of knowledge which has been named human nature in the Book of God, the Holy Qur'an, as: "Follow the nature designed by Allah, the nature according to which He has fashioned mankind." (1)

What is the purpose of that nature? Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (as), Mahdi and Messiah of this age writes: "It is to believe in God as One, without associate, Creator of all, above birth and death. We have described conscience as a source of knowledge by certainty of inference though, apparently, in this case the mind does not travel from one type of knowledge to another as it does on the observation of smoke to the inference of fire, and yet here also there is a very fine type of transference, which is that God has invested everything with a particular quality which cannot be described in words, but towards which one's mind is directed immediately upon observing that thing or contemplating it. That quality is inherent in everything as smoke is inherent in fire. For instance, when we contemplate the Being of God Almighty and consider what it should be, whether God should be born like us and should suffer and die like us, instantly thereat our heart is tormented and our conscience trembles and indignantly rejects any such idea and cries out that the God, upon Whose powers all our hopes are centred, must be free from all defects and must be Holy and Perfect and Powerful.

The moment we think of God, we perceive a perfect relationship between God and Unity, even exceeding that which subsists between fire and smoke. Therefore, the knowledge that we gain through conscience is knowledge at the stage of certainty through inference. But there is

another stage about it which is called knowledge through certainty of sight.

That is a degree of knowledge when there is no intermediary between us and that of which we have gained knowledge. For instance, when we perceive a good or bad smell through our sense of smell, or perceive the sweetness or saltiness of something through our sense of taste, or perceive the warmth or coldness of anything through our sense of feeling, all such knowledge is, as it were, certainty through sight." (2)



References:

1. The Holy Qur'an, (30:31)
2. Hazrat Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, "The Philosophy of the Teachings of Islam," Translated into English by Sir Muhammad Zafrulla Khan, Islam International Publications Ltd., UK 2010 (ISBN 1-85372-193-X, ISBN 1-85372-198-0 Pbk), Pp 195-197

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